

Renewed in Christ

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“When we understand the character of God, and know how to come to Him, he begins to unfold the heavens to us, and to tell us all about it. When we are ready to come to him, he is ready to come to us.”

-Joseph Smith Jr.

“When we awake and are born of God, a new day will break, and Zion will be redeemed. May we choose to follow Him, be changed for Him, captained by Him, consumed in Him, and born again.”

-Ezra Taft Benson

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Introduction

SOMETHING'S WRONG

There is something very wrong happening.

Our relationships with our Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ are not what they should and could be. At least for far too many members of the Church. I have seen this problem for many years, but it really hit me hard when someone with whom I am very close to stopped going to our Church and started attending other churches. When I asked her about it, she said she just felt closer to God when attending those other churches. If this is God's Kingdom upon the earth, how can that be happening more and more frequently?

Have you seen this problem? Have you seen lifelong members leaving and joining in with other churches, or losing belief in God completely? Maybe you have seen it in members striving to do what they should be doing but still feeling disconnected with God. Have you also seen it with individuals getting baptized but who's conversion is very shallow, and they soon go inactive?

There are many reasons people walk away from activity and connection with the Church, but my feeling is that the following is part of a foundational problem.

In so many instances, those individuals were converted to the Church but not to Christ. They had testimonies of the Kingdom, but not the King. This is not just with new converts but lifelong members. They received testimonies that the Church is true, but did they also get a testimony that Christ is true? Yes, they had testimonies in the existence of God, but did they know the goodness of God?

Our Lord Jesus Christ is our foundation, our light, our peace, our strength, our way, and so very much more. Our Father sent His Son because Jesus can help us get through any challenge in life. Without a doubt, this Church is God's Kingdom upon the earth again. But the Kingdom cannot fill all those many needs for us that Christ can, and the Church, or its members, will let us down sometimes. However, our Lord Jesus Christ will never let us down. The Kingdom does help us, but only to the extent that it helps us come to the King.

The Kingdom is only great because the King is great and glorious, and worthy of all our adoration and praise.

President Howard W. Hunter taught, "We must know Christ better than we know him; we must remember him more often than we remember him." Living lives of purpose and meaning comes from God through learning to walk with Him in a relationship.

This book is all about knowing the Savior and connecting with Him and abiding in Him. God wants us to have a close relationship with Him. He wants us to walk with Him and abide in that intimate closeness with Him. But how can we have that? To me, there are three elements to

answering these questions, and those elements can be found in the three sections of this book.

Knowing God

Before you can walk with God, or even desire to have a relationship with Him, you must know who God is. Before becoming fast friends with a person, you would first need to meet them and get to know them. Somewhere in that process, you would decide if the other person is someone you would want to invest in a relationship with and become close to. So it is with God and us. Very often, the reason people do not want to follow Christ is that they have not learned how kind, loving and wonderful He is. The first section of this book gives further insights to the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, and knowing Their goodness and love in ways you may not have considered before. We will explore His wonderful character, powers, and ultimate goodness that draw people to Him.

Connecting with God

When two people come to know each other, the next step is establishing a relationship and discovering the nature and extent of what their relationship will be. As our Father, God deeply desires to be with us, His children, and have a long term forever relationship with each of us. If we can develop that closeness with God, even in the most difficult circumstances of this fallen world, then in the next life, that heavenly intimacy will be all that more durable. That precious closeness with God comes by connecting with His precious Son Jesus Christ through conversion and covenants.

Abiding in Christ

If we are going to walk with the Lord, where will we go together, and what will we do? Is the purpose simply to enjoy each other's company? That actually is one of the sweet benefits of a relationship with God. But the Lord has much more in store as we take this epic journey through life together. When we live as His disciples, we are living with clarity of purpose and direction. We live daily with closeness to God.

Towards the end of the book, we will again explore the idea of putting the King before the Kingdom. We will also explore other barriers that get in our way of having God's Spirit with us to a greater degree.

Section One

KNOWING GOD

“I want you all to know Him, and to be familiar with Him”

“It is the first principle of the gospel to know for a certainty the character of God.”

-Joseph Smith¹

Chapter One

ARE YOU ALIVE?

“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”

-John 10:10

Are you really living?

In a sense, many people are not living, but just existing. They may move and breathe just fine, but countless are living lives without any meaning or purpose. William Wallace, the Scottish revolutionary said, “Every man dies. Not every man really lives.”²

In quiet moments, when you look inside yourself, is there an emptiness within? Is there a hunger and thirst that the world has never filled for long? Many people in this world are vacant inside.

Unhappy, countless individuals live lives of going to work, coming home, searching for some entertainment, and then going to sleep, just to do it all over again the next day. Everywhere, people are suffering with depression, loneliness, thoughts of suicide, anxiety, and worry so that they turn to drugs, alcohol, pornography, eating disorders, and sexual perversion. Individuals chase after happiness and fulfillment, thinking it will come with the next thing they buy, or some new relationship.

People are running from one diversion to the next. Multitudes try to distract themselves from their emptiness inside through TV shows, movies, and entertainment. They may seek distraction so that they never have to look closely at themselves and the hollowness of their lives. They may find pleasure in something new, but in the end, it still leaves them empty and unfulfilled.

What is the problem? Separation from God. What is the solution? Finding communion and companionship with Him.

Without God, we will always be unfulfilled and have that hollow, unsatisfied place in our hearts. Although we try to fill the void the world's way, it just never works. Despite the promises of "social media," many people have never been more lonely, disconnected, and empty inside. Like Enos, without God, our souls will be hungry.³

We need to have God's presence, or Spirit, in our day to day lives. This is what it means to walk with God. Without the Lord in our lives, something will always be missing, and we will be unfulfilled. C.S. Lewis said:

"God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own

way without bothering about faith. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing."⁴

Joy and fulfilment come from Christ. President Russell M. Nelson taught, "The joy we feel has little to do with the circumstances of our lives and everything to do with the focus of our lives... Joy comes from and because of Him. He is the source of all joy... For Latter-day Saints, Jesus Christ is joy!"⁵

The world and Satan try to peddle alternatives that will never work. People get the idea that when they reach some level of accomplishment, or achieve some lofty goal, then they will feel successful and happy. But it usually does not work, or last for very long at all. The World wants us to think that power, popularity, and prestige will bring fulfillment. But we find that those desires are unquenchable. Likewise, money can bring more choices, pleasures, fun, and some comforts, but not lasting happiness.

The Beatles are a great example to illustrate this principle. They had it all: popularity, ultimate success in their field, and money. But even amid their great success, George Harrison said, "There was never anything, in any of the Beatle experiences really, that good: even the best thrill soon got tiring."⁶

Can our personal relationships with others make us happy? Will finding our soulmate or the perfect spouse do it? Perhaps we get this idea from the many Disney movies where the person finds their prince or princess, that makes all of their dreams come true. But this idea is far older than Disney.

Jesus met a woman with this delusion. In John 4, we find Jesus meeting a woman of Samaria at a well of water. She came to the well so

she could have water to quench her body's thirst. But Jesus saw that she also had a different type of thirst in her life. Jesus told her He had water that if a person drank of it, they would never thirst again. The woman, realizing that Jesus was speaking in a metaphor, asked Jesus for this water. Jesus then identified to the woman where she had been trying to find happiness in her life without success. Jesus said to the woman in verse 18, "For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband." Because of the many relationships she had been in, we can conclude that the woman felt that if she could just have a relationship with "the right guy," she would be fulfilled as an individual. If she could find her knight in shining armor, who would make her happy, then all her dreams would come true, and then she would feel satisfied and complete. But God never intended this role for a spouse. Our spouses can do much towards a happy life, but in the end, it will never be enough for inner personal peace. It is only having a relationship with God that can fulfill and complete us as individuals. Jesus invited her to come to know God better, and her life changed. God put Adam and Eve together, but them being together was not to replace the relationship and presence of God in their lives. God was meant to fill a large and crucial part of their relationship, and it is the same with our marriages today.

"Get a Life!"

Do people use that insult much anymore? Looking back on growing up, I remember it was a strange world where we could verbally attack each other, tease, insult, and consider it all kidding around, and still be friends. At times it seemed we had a somewhat fun competition of trying to put each other down in the most ingenious ways. We would say vicious things to each other like, "Don't be such a loser!" And if anyone actually got offended or hurt by what was said, we thought we could make it all disappear by saying magic words like, "Dude, I was just

joking around,” or “Don’t take things so seriously.” But as all of us have learned, cruel words usually hurt worse than sticks and stones could.

“Get a life!” seemed to be one of those phrases that could jab into someone deeply. Have you ever considered what that means? We would often say it to people who were obsessed with some activity that we found pointless or boring.

“Get a life!”

Would it surprise you to know that Jesus may have been the first to express this idea? In John 10:10, the Lord taught, “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly.” When I first read this verse, I assumed that Jesus was referring to how He has come to help us have Eternal Life after we die. Of course, this is true, but then the words about having life “more abundantly” stood out to me to be also referring to this mortal life. At the beginning of the verse, we learn that, in this life, the thief –Satan, tries to steal, kill, and destroy. The Devil wants to steal all hope, kill our dreams, and destroy all that is good and right. He wants to drive our lives into a complete abyss of chaos and misery right now. Likewise, if we are keeping with the context, the second half of the verse refers to this life. Jesus has come to give us a real life –an abundant, fulfilling life.

To the Lord, it is not just about having an abundant life after we die; He wants us to have that abundant, meaningful life now.

“Get a life? I’m alive, aren’t I? I’m living and breathing.” I think Jesus was pointing out that most people are not *truly* alive, they are just existing.

Not only do we want to have the abundant life, but we want the prosperous life. Of course, prosperity usually is not confined to wealth.

How was Joseph of Egypt able to prosper when circumstances were usually so difficult? More than with any other person, we see in the scriptures that, “the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand.”⁷ In other words, having the Lord with us *is* the prosperous life. But how do we learn to live in God’s presence as Joseph did?

A few years back, some teenagers were starting to use the term “YOLO,” which is the acronym for, “You Only Live Once.” It was a lighthearted excuse to live life with abandonment and do everything and anything without worrying about consequences. A battle cry to live without reservation.

The funny thing is, the idea, “You Only Live Once,” is partially true, but the conclusion should be very different. We only have one shot at this life! Eventually, we will all die and leave this life. Whether we will have 18 or 118 years, our time in this life is finite. And once we die, we will look back on this life with either satisfaction or regret. We will either look back with pleasure that we lived lives of meaning and purpose, or we will look back with remorse that we squandered the precious time we had. Will we make a difference with our lives for good? Will we make this world a better place?

In Psalms 39:4, it says, “Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it *is*; *that* I may know how frail I *am*.” We need to know that this life will have an “end,” and there is only a finite number of hours and days to measure before we leave this “frail” existence. We need to make the most of the limited precious time we have.

Jesus taught, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”⁸ We can understand this to refer to things just in the next life: Jesus is “the way” that leads to Eternal Life; “the

truth” that Jesus taught will lead us to Eternal Life; and we can say that all Jesus did is to help us have “the life” that is eternal. But like John 10:10, this scripture also refers to all that the Lord offers us in this mortal life. Jesus is “the way” to the meaningful, purpose-filled life we are to have while we sojourn here on Earth. The Lord is “the truth” that helps guide us and direct us to make the most of this life. Jesus is “the life,” or the only way to make a life of purpose in mortality. We may be alive, but we are not truly living without the Lord in our lives. The Savior is the way for us to escape from the stagnant doldrums, and discover the meaningful.

The Lord is the way for us to wake up and stop living on autopilot; to stop going through the motions: to live lives of action.

In Alma 37:47, Alma teaches his son, “See that ye look to God and live.” Again, I think this is not just saying to “live” in the next life, but to “look to God,” and start living now. In Acts 5:20, when an angel is breaking Peter and John out of prison, he told them to go out into the courtyard of the Temple and to teach, “all the words of *this* life.” There it makes clear that it is “this life” that the Gospel will affect first.

Without exception, Jesus wants each of us to have lives of impact and meaning. He wants us to have lives with direction. Like Moses, the Lord has a work and a mission, and plan for each of us in this life.⁹ The Lord wants us to follow Him, bless others’ lives, and make this world a better place than how we found it. This is what it is to really be living. It is not the *easy* life – it is the *meaningful* life. It is the life for which we were purposed.

In Haggai 1:5-6, it says:

“Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough;

ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.”

In other words, without God in our lives, we will always be metaphorically empty, hungry, thirsty, cold, and poor.

It is never too late for anyone. Moses did not get started walking with the Lord until his life was two-thirds over.¹⁰ The most meaningful part of our lives can still be ahead.

How to pursue a life with real purpose and meaning is what this book is all about. And that meaning only comes through a close relationship with God and His presence in our lives, guiding and fulfilling us. The Lord came to give us a more abundant life, and He is the only way to that life. There is no real, meaningful, or long-term satisfaction in life that does not come through God.

The Lord loves you more deeply and more personally than anyone has ever loved you.

You matter to God more than you have ever mattered to anyone you have ever known, EVER.

The Lord adores you!

Right now, God has a purpose, a mission, and a destiny for you. He has a life for you that is more fulfilling and meaningful than you can possibly imagine. And it all flows from our relationship with God.

WALKING WITH GOD

Zion is our goal here on this earth. Joseph Smith taught, “We ought to have the building up of Zion as our greatest object.”¹¹ But how do we become a Zion like people, ready for the Lord’s return? In a sense, this

is what it is all about. I think the secret of how to have Zion on the earth is right there in the first scriptures about Zion. The book of Moses comes from the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. In Genesis 5, where we have only seven verses about Enoch, the inspired translation expands it to 117 verses in two chapters. But the secret is still there in those verses. In the brief account in Genesis 5, it reads, “And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters: And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.”

Consider that repeated phrase that summarized Enoch’s relationship with the Lord, “Enoch walked with God.” Enoch learned to have a relationship with God like that of two people who would go for walks together. Daily, Enoch strove to commune with God in his walk through this life. As we look closely at these verses, we see that Enoch did not always have this closeness with the Lord. It was not until the birth of his first son that Enoch began to walk with God.¹² Likewise, in the book of Moses, we learn that Enoch was not a monk who was secluded away from other people, so he could meditate and have some isolated communion with God on a mountain top. Enoch was the builder of a city, and the political and spiritual leader of a people. He was also a husband and a parent. Yet he was a man that, despite the many demands of life, learned how to walk with God. Enoch was also an incredible teacher as he led and disciplined his people. As Enoch came to know the Lord and live in His Spirit, he taught his people of God’s goodness and led them to seek this same closeness and discipleship with the Lord. In Moses 7:69, we learn that eventually, “Enoch *and all his people* walked with God.”

They were not the only ones to accomplish this. God has always lovingly strived to have a relationship with each of His children. Enoch was only one of the many descendants of Adam, who had an individual

and personal relationship with the Lord. “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord; for Noah... walked with God, as also did his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth”.¹³ Throughout the scriptures, all the great men and women of God have sought this closeness with the Lord.

But the Lord does not choose just a select few to share this intimacy. God has always sought communion and relationship with each of us. When the Children of Israel came out of Egypt, He told them, “And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people.”¹⁴ Later in scripture, the Lord says about His people, “...I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people”.¹⁵ Paul also taught, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.”¹⁶ Are not those remarkable word pictures –to have the Lord “walk in us,” and then we are commanded to “walk in him”? In Doctrine & Covenants 19:23, the Lord says, “Learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit, and you shall have peace in me.” It is interesting that as a person learns to walk with God and commune with His Spirit, the other goals of progressing and learning to be happy, come automatically.

Naturally, Jesus Christ is the supreme example of walking with the Father in a perfect relationship with constant communion. He showed us all what our relationship with the Father can be. He lived in God. He lived in perfect harmony with the Father in every way. They were one together. In the New Testament, we often find Jesus getting up early to pray and always communing and spending time with His Father in Heaven.¹⁷ Perhaps the most difficult test of Christ’s life was when He was on the cross and for the first time, Jesus experienced the absence of the Father’s presence.¹⁸ Jesus always sought to do those things that pleased His Father.¹⁹ Throughout His life, Jesus always walked with His Father.

As it was in the beginning, so it is now. God deeply desires that we walk with Him and dwell in His goodness and Spirit. He desires this relationship. Each Sunday, as we commune with the sacrament, we renew all our covenants and commitments, so we “may always have his Spirit to be with” us. The Christian life just does not work without God’s Spirit as we walk together through this life.

So, here is the starting place and first step. Living lives of purpose and meaning comes from God and through learning to walk with Him in a relationship.

Joseph Smith greatly emphasized how we must understand the true character of God to have real faith. He taught: “It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God.”²⁰ He continued, “When we understand the character of God, and know how to come to Him, he begins to unfold the heavens to us, and to tell us all about it. When we are ready to come to him, he is ready to come to us.”²¹ To unpack that last quote a little, it is basically saying, “When we understand the character of God (knowing God and His goodness and powers), and know how to come to Him (come into an actual relationship with God), he begins to unfold the heavens to us and tell us all about it (everything starts to open to our spiritual understanding). When we are ready to come to him, he is ready to come to us (the relationship with God as His disciple.

¹ History of the Church, 6:30

² -Sir William Wallace born c. 1270, died 23 August 1305) was a Scottish knight who became one of the main leaders during the First War of Scottish Independence.

³ Enos 1:3-4

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Harper Collins, 1952) p.50

⁵ Russell M. Nelson, *Joy and Spiritual Survival*, General Conference October 2016

⁶ George Harrison from his book “I, Me, Mine”. 1979

⁷ Genesis 39:2-3, 21-23

⁸ John 14:6

⁹ Moses 1:6

¹⁰ See Acts 7:22-30

¹¹ History of the Church, 2:52

¹² Genesis 5:22

¹³ Moses 8:27

¹⁴ Leviticus 26:12

¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 6:16

¹⁶ Colossians 2:6

¹⁷ See Mark 1:35; Matthew 14:23; Luke 6:12

¹⁸ See Matthew 27:46

¹⁹ John 8:29

²⁰ Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 345

²¹ Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith (2007), 40–41.

Chapter Two

“JESUS LIVES!”

“And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives!”

-Doctrine & Covenants 76:22

After realizing we desperately need God, we need to know what is God’s purpose for us. What part does God want to play in our lives? Let us look at this in a roundabout way.

Is there anything you live for? What gives your life meaning and purpose? Do you live for music, reading, or a particular sport or hobby? Are your children, or friends what you live for? What do you think about when you do not have to think about anything at all? Most likely, that is your passion in life and what you live for.

As you think about what you live for, consider what it means to *live* for something. “I live for basketball!” “I live for chocolate!” “I live for my grandchildren!” Perhaps it means that the someone or something is what makes your life worthwhile. Such a thing could be a person’s focus in life or their source of satisfaction. If you were to say that you live for basketball that would mean that basketball is your passion in life. Likewise, a grandmother who says, “I live for my grandchildren” feels that those little ones are her ultimate source of joy, pleasure, and satisfaction. Without those grandchildren, she might think that her life has lost its meaning. Now perhaps there are times when a person says they live for something without being completely serious. For instance, “I live for chocolate” is probably an exaggeration for most people. Yet even then, you can be sure they find a great deal of pleasure in it.

So, is there anything in your life that you could say you live for? What are the first and last things you think about each day? Are there some activities, people, hobbies, or interests that mean that much to you?

What if we were to ask the Lord that same question? What do you think the Savior lives for and what gives His life joy and fulfillment? The answer might be surprising.

Many years ago, just after my mission, I was sitting in a church meeting considering life. I felt quite alone and discouraged. There is a saying, “The darkest hour is just before the dawn.”¹ In this church meeting, I was feeling all sorts of darkness. I was feeling lost and very distant from God. As I was struggling, the Lord sent a tender mercy my way. Earlier in the meeting, we had sung the hymn, “I Know That My Redeemer Lives.” After the hymn concluded, I just could not concentrate on the speaker’s words, so I opened to the hymn again and started reading the words. I noticed that in the first and second verses,

there was a phrase that was repeated over and over again, “He lives to...” and then the song would state different things the Lord lives to do. In my fog, I was confused with what this hymn was expressing, which I am sure I had usually sung on mental autopilot. I had often heard people say in their testimonies that they knew Jesus Christ lives; I also knew Jesus was a resurrected Being. But that did not seem to be what the hymn was trying to express with the word “lives.” Then the lights started to turn on for me. This hymn was talking about what our Lord Jesus Christ lives for. This hymn was speaking to me about the Lord in a way I had never considered before.

He lives... to bless me with his love.
to plead for me above.
my hungry soul to feed.
to bless in time of need.

Earlier, when considering the things you “live for,” were your responses somewhat selfish in nature? The Lord lives in complete unselfishness for us. And what is more surprising, is not just that the Lord blesses us with His love, or pleads for us above, but that these are the things He “lives” for.

We are not some chore or pastime to the Lord.

Feeding our hungry souls and blessing us in our times of need are His passion and pursuit.

He lives... to grant me rich supply.
to guide me with his eye.
to comfort me when faint.
to hear my soul’s complaint.

Renewed in Christ

To some degree, have you lived to bless your own life and grant yourself a “rich supply”? In contrast, the Savior has found His purpose and desire in blessing, guiding, and comforting us. And it is not that we are just part of some routine to the Lord or thoughtless duty or obligation. We are His focus.

One of the most incredible lines is, “He lives to hear my soul’s complaint.” Have you ever known someone who would sometimes dump all of their life’s difficulties on you when you talked with them? And although you are a kind person, did you ever feel that this bearing of their burdens began to weary and weigh on you a bit? Perhaps you even began to dread being with that person again? In contrast to us, our Lord Jesus Christ not only endures these times of hearing our soul’s complaints, but He finds great pleasure in being able to help us in this way. It could be said, He lives for it. He delights and finds terrific gratification in being a listening ear, as He listens with a heart filled with love and concern.

He lives... to silence all my fears.

to wipe away my tears.

to calm my troubled heart.

all blessings to impart.

It is not just that He enjoys silencing all our fears or wiping away our tears -He lives for it. Calming our troubled hearts is what gives meaning and satisfaction to His existence. Imparting blessings is where He finds His most significant source of joy and pleasure.

It amazes me how intensely devoted and involved the Lord is with us. Words like absorbed, immersed, engrossed, wrapped up, captivated, concerned, constant, faithful, and loyal, only begin to describe His disposition towards us. Here on earth, most of us get so intensely

involved in ourselves. In contrast, Christ's full energy is spent on others, lifting the life of each individual. And this is the message we will see throughout the scriptures.

Do you also get the idea that we are not some part-time job or passing hobby for the Lord? Consider for a moment: if you were God, you could spend your time doing some pretty exciting things. Have you ever wondered what it would look like if two massive stars ran into each other? As God, you could make that happen just for kicks. What if you made some fascinating changes to the biology of some creature, what would the result be? Yet it appears that such things are not where the Lord receives satisfaction. His interests are not in some new creation, or Biology or Galaxy Formation 101. His whole purpose and interest is us. We have His total attention and devotion. In other words, He lives for us.

And here is the point where I was especially lost in the hymn. I did not understand what part Christ wants to play in my life now. Notice that the hymn talks about how, "He lives" not, "He lived" or "He will live." Most of us have been well educated on what Christ has *done* for us (past tense): He lived as a perfect example to follow, and He suffered and died for us so we can repent. Most also understand what the Lord *will do* (future tense): He will bring to pass our resurrection, He will be our Judge and Advocate, and He will grant us an inheritance in a beautiful kingdom of glory. What I was missing was understanding what Christ *does* for us now (present tense), and the relationship He is seeking to constantly have with us.

As strange as it may sound, we must not just know that God *lives*, but also that He is *alive*. This lack of understanding is ironic because perhaps the most exciting part of the Gospel is what the Lord Jesus Christ currently wants to do in our lives. The Lord does not intend the

Atonement to be a past-tense thing in our lives, or only significant in the future, or in the context of the repentance process. Instead, He wants to be part of our lives in the here and now. Boyd K. Packer has taught, “For some reason, we think the Atonement of Christ applies only at the end of mortal life to redemption from the Fall, from spiritual death. It is much more than that. It is an ever-present power to call upon in everyday life. The Atonement has practical, personal, everyday value.”²

You might have previously heard that the word “Atonement” can be broken up to “At-one-ment.” So, the meaning of the word is to “put at one.” The great and last sacrifice of Jesus Christ is so that we can be one with God again. Usually, when we refer to the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we think of God reconciling His estranged creation unto Himself, or the putting back “at one” God and man. Why is it so important that the two separate parties be brought back together again? Why does God want to bridge that gap between Him and us? It is because, more than anything else, God wants to be with us.

He does not just desire to be with us after we die and are resurrected, but He desires that relationship with us right now. God wants to be part of our lives presently, as much as He wants to be with us throughout the eternities.

Cleave is a word that usually means to stick or fasten two objects together. For instance, if you wanted to make a shelf, you would need to cleave the two pieces of wood to each other. To do this, you would make joints and use glue or fasteners to make the two pieces of wood into one object—the shelf. In Jacob 6:5, we are commanded to “cleave unto God as he cleaveth unto you.” It is no surprise that we are told to cleave to God; we would have everything to gain by being that close to the Lord. But the shocking part is where the verse also says, “as he cleaveth unto you.” God yearns to be that close to us. Cleave does not

just mean to be next to or close by. If two people were cleaving to each other, they would be grasping each other tightly, with no space between them. And that is the closeness God desires with us.

We must remember that the Lord is striving just as hard to save our souls right now, as He strived nearly two-thousand years ago in a Garden and on a Cross. He is still just as actively involved in our progress and salvation.

I used to think of the Lord much differently than I do now. I thought of Him as someone in partial retirement who had set the world on a kind of autopilot. I thought of Him as one who said, in essence, “Good luck down there! I’ve done my part; now you do yours. I have lived a perfect life as an example for you. I’ve given my words in the scriptures, and I’ve even provided the Atonement by which you can repent. My part is done. Now let’s see how well you can do your part.” Then I imagined that with love, He sent us on our way, hoping that we would be able to do what we needed to do in this life.

But the scriptures show us a Lord who desires to play a more direct and active role in our lives. Rather than “my part” and “your part,” the scriptures express “our part.” Rather than separate *parts*, the scriptures reveal a *partnership* with God and us.

This is what this life is all about!

In Doctrine & Covenants 76, there is a famous verse that is often misunderstood. In verse 22 it says, “And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives!” Were Joseph and Sydney saying that they would not be bearing their testimonies anymore after this? Not hardly. This was more than ten years before Joseph’s martyrdom. What they were saying is, “Here is the testimony of all

testimonies. This is the grandest point that can and will ever be made: Jesus Lives! Jesus is Alive for us!”

So, what does God want with you? He desires you; and wants to be an active living part of your life. The Lord wants a relationship with you in the most personal and complete sense.

We have looked at what the Savior lives for. What are you living for? If you asked the Apostle Paul that question, we know what he would say. After the Lord showed him His incredible grace and mercy, Paul summed up what his newly given life is all about. He said in Philippians 1:21, “For to me to live is Christ.” Jesus lives for us, and until we are living for Him, we will never be really living at all.

Ezra Taft Benson taught something of the same thing when he said, “When we awake and are born of God, a new day will break, and Zion will be redeemed. May we be convinced that Jesus is the Christ, choose to follow Him, be changed for Him, captained by Him, *consumed in Him*, and born again.”³ Being in Christ and in a relationship with Him is where we genuinely start to change and develop into men and women of God.

Years ago, as I started to learn these things, it set my life on a path to come to know the Lord and learn all I could find out about that relationship He desires to have with us. This book contains those insights I have learned from the Lord and His prophets in that time. I pray they will be a blessing to you, as these principles have blessed me. “Oh, sweet the joy this sentence gives: ‘I know that my Redeemer lives!’”

¹ The origins of this quote are attributed to Thomas Fuller

² 'The Touch of the Master's Hand,' Ensign, May 2001, 23-24

³ July 1989, First Presidency Message, *Born of God*

