

JOY

Accessing Divine Grace & Love

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REL 275 Section 003

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Friday, March 22, 2024

Brigham Young University

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As I navigate life, I've discovered a transformative principle that turns challenges into stepping stones and sorrow into strength. This guiding light paves the way for enduring happiness and peace and deepens my connection with a love that transcends everyday experiences. In this essay, I will share how this powerful formula has impacted my life, drawing on my own experiences, insights from members and leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and scripture. These sources illuminate how this principle fosters trust in a higher plan, acknowledges a sacrifice made for us that blesses our lives immeasurably, and prepares us for a future beyond our current understanding. This principle has been the key to navigating life's tumultuous waters with grace, allowing me to emerge unscathed and sanctified, ready to embrace a higher existence and purpose. It is the pathway to leading an unequivocally prosperous and joy-filled life.

FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH AND EARLY LESSONS

At age three, while part of the Sunbeam class in Primary, I learned about the divine nature and loving characteristics of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost. This knowledge, imbued with truth, made perfect sense to me, and it was spiritual guidance vital for my entire life. The impact on my faith was so profound that I immediately invited my neighborhood friends to join me at Primary on Wednesday afternoons. I wanted them to experience the same joy and happiness from understanding God's love and Jesus Christ's Atonement.

I vividly recall being shown impactful images of Jesus Christ on the cross, evoking a deep emotional response, followed by the joy experienced by Mary when, upon closer inspection in the garden, she realized the person beside her was her friend, Jesus.¹ The teachings about the Holy Ghost as a "comforter" and his crucial role within the Godhead were clear—he was to be the medium through which our Heavenly Father communicated his desires, provided warnings, or reminded us of our blessings. However, the most resonant belief for me was the understanding that my Heavenly Father knows me personally, loves me, has a specific plan for my life, and sees my potential and what I can become. I believed in God. I knew He was with me and that He and I could converse throughout the day, all day, every day. And we have.

As I regularly attended Primary, my conviction in my testimony only grew stronger with each lesson on the gospel's truths. The vision of Joseph Smith encountering Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ was something I never doubted—I was sure it happened. Similarly, my belief in the

truth of the Book of Mormon was unwavering. I cherished my time in Primary, from singing the songs to the connections I formed with our leaders and teachers who guided us every week. Among the essential teachings I learned were the thirteen Articles of Faith, which I committed to memory.²

The first Article of Faith declares, "We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost."³ This statement gave me a straightforward answer to share with anyone curious about the beliefs of "the Mormons." Reciting the first Article of Faith came naturally to me. But its significance extended beyond mere words.

The prophet Joseph Smith taught, "It is the first principle of the gospel to know for a certainty the character of God."⁴ The existence and nature of truth is one of the fundamental questions of mortal life. Jesus told the Roman governor Pilate that He came into the world to "bear witness unto the truth." "What is truth?" that unbeliever responded.⁵ In earlier times the Savior had declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the life"⁶. In modern revelation He declared: "Truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come."⁷

CHERISHED MOMENTS AND CHALLENGING TIMES

Growing up, I was a joyful kid, cherishing the times with my older sister and later with my younger siblings as they arrived. I looked up to my mom, marveling at her capabilities and daily achievements. My dad was the embodiment of fun, especially when mom was out, allowing us to turn up the music, dance, and be playfully reckless in ways we wouldn't dare if she were around. My admiration for my dad soared when he brought home the first personal computer he had contributed to designing with the Army Corps of Engineers. He was instrumental in developing the system that pioneered email, securing one of the initial fourteen email addresses in the United States enabling him to communicate with Brigham Young University.

In the first week of March 1982, our lives were abruptly altered when my dad disappeared. My heart ached with the certainty that something was terribly amiss, as he had never failed to come home from work. I clung to the hope that he would return until the day our mother asked our Bishop to visit and share a grave piece of news with us. My older sister was ten, I was eight, and my younger siblings were four and two. We gathered in the "front room" to hear the newly appointed Bishop,⁸ who was thirty-five at the time, explain that two hikers had discovered our dad in the Arizona desert, and had died by suicide in his car. Instantly, we were

forced to confront this catastrophe, which had inflicted profound trauma not just on our immediate family but also on our relatives, our local church community, and everyone who knew us.

DISCOVERING GRACE AND UNDERSTANDING GOD'S PLAN

In the tumultuous days that followed my father's passing, amidst a whirlwind of activities, my maternal grandfather, serving as the Patriarch in the Morgan Hill Stake in California, took the time to share a crucial lesson with me. He explained in his distinguishable voice that Heavenly Father loves each of us and has a distinct plan for our lives. He elaborated that before our earthly journey began, we were aware we would encounter significant trials, but we agreed to embrace these challenges, learn from them, and ultimately aid others in similar situations. My grandfather also shared that Heavenly Father knew in advance about this tragic event and that the only way to find true hope and healing was for me to seek strength and support from Him and our Savior during such times. He gently warned that healing from such a deep loss would be a lengthy process, possibly leaving an enduring ache. Yet, he assured me that through the Atonement, we would receive resilience through the blessing of our Savior's grace to persevere in this life, and in the next part of our "lives" (the Spirit World), we would eventually understand the reasons why our family needed to experience this particular pain.

My grandfather repeated these thoughts and gospel-based teachings as we traveled from Arizona to California, moving closer to my mom's parents in the aftermath of my dad's death. Throughout that journey, as an eight-year-old girl, I was consistently given two things: the relief provided by Dramamine and the evolving conversation about the essence of "Grace"⁹ and the omniscience of God.¹⁰

Bruce R. McConkie confirmed what my grandfather was saying, "an omnipotent God has deliberately and advisedly placed us in the circumstances in which we now find ourselves, with enticements and lusts of every sort around us, for the very purpose of determining whether we will overcome the world, whether we will turn to spiritual things rather than be engulfed in carnal things."¹¹

When we talk of God, we usually use simple terms to describe Him, like the ability to be all-loving and all-powerful. Those are terms and concepts most members of the Church seem to be comfortable with. However, the idea of an all-knowing or omniscient God who literally knows everything tends to bring out differing opinions. Even for the most faithful and knowledgeable members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, me included, the omniscience of God is a difficult concept to become comfortable with. I have heard many varying opinions on

the truth about God's ability to know what will happen with each of us and our individual lives. I often hear that he has known us long enough that he just knows us well enough to know what we will choose; I have listened to how He has gained this supreme knowledge, how He continues to "learn new knowledge," and how extensive experience and wisdom have given Him the ability to guess right about what our decisions and actions will be in the future. Hearing about all these varying theories has been very confusing. Sadly, when we are uncomfortable and do not understand the true meaning of God's omniscience, we are unable to entirely rely on His Grace and Salvation that comes with The Plan of Happiness, which makes us unable to access the full blessings and assurance that come from knowing God's true nature.

The omniscience of God is a concept that has become increasingly important to me as I attempt to learn more about my dad's decision to take his own life. I happened to be the last person to hear him speak or to see him alive. I have struggled with the thoughts that I should have done or said something to help him want to stay with us. And thoughts of "If God knew my dad was going to take his life and the hurt it would cause our family, why did He allow it?" Alternatively, "if being raised without a dad has impeded my potential to learn and progress in this life?" These tough "why" questions have entered my mind throughout my life. The varying opinions about the foreknowledge of God have made making sense of my dad's suicide and God's inaction difficult to reconcile over the years. In the most recent years, I have gained a new perspective on that last moment with my dad, and I am so grateful that I had the blessing to see him and speak to him one last time. An opportunity my mom and siblings didn't have.

JOURNEY TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING AND HEALING

Most individuals with faith in God acknowledge that comprehending the full breadth of God's omniscience is beyond human ability. King Benjamin taught his people that we are not only to "Believe in God," but we need to believe "that man doth not comprehend all the things the Lord can comprehend."¹³ But even with a statement like this one, somewhere along the way, the idea that "the past, the present, and the future were and are, with Him, one eternal 'now'" is too hard to believe for some.¹⁴ Something inside humans, possibly pride, makes it hard for us to accept that there is a being who already knows everything we think, say or do. That somehow, this perfect knowledge diminishes our ability to be independent or exercise our agency freely.

God does not and will not violate our ability to choose and experience life for ourselves. One of the quotes that helped me finally understand the concept of Foreordination is from Elder Maxwell in his devotional talk “Meeting the Challenges of Today.” He shared, “Foreordination is like any other blessing—it is a conditional bestowal subject to our faithfulness... So Foreordination is a conditional bestowal of a role, a responsibility, or a blessing which, likewise, (He) foresees but does not fix the outcome.”¹⁵

The concept of time is another aspect that seems to contribute to a misunderstanding of God’s omniscience. The idea that God has foreknowledge of things that “have not happened yet” does not fit within our current human understanding of time. So, instead, some think God must be a fantastic prognosticator, a supreme being Who knows so much about us. He can predict everything in perfect detail, even when it has not happened yet. Adjusting our will to match God’s will is the primary purpose of this life; as Elder Maxwell taught, “The submission of one’s will is really the only uniquely personal thing we have to place on God’s altar. The many other things we ‘give’ are those He has already given or loaned to us.”¹⁶ Elder Maxwell also said,

“Required, in particular, is meekness of mind which recognizes God’s perfect love of us and His omniscience. By acknowledging these reassuring realities and accepting that God desires our full development and true happiness, we are readied even as the learning experiences come. Such meekness requires genuine intellectual honesty, owning up to the learning experiences of the past and listening to the Holy Ghost as he preaches to us from the pulpit of memory.”

“Yet we need to break free of our old selves—the provincial, constraining, and complaining selves—and become susceptible to the shaping of the Lord. But the old self goes neither gladly nor quickly. Even so, this subjection to God is really emancipation.”¹⁷

A few scriptures in the Book of Mormon make God’s omniscience clear. Mormon states that he includes certain things in his abridgment of the records of the Nephites because the spirit has told him to include them. Moreover, including these records is for a “wise purpose” that Mormon does not know, then he shares, “but the Lord knoweth all things which are to come.”¹⁸ God “knows” all things. Jacob preaches that God “knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it.”¹ The phrase “there is not anything save he knows it” clarifies that

God's omniscience is nothing less than perfect. He knows everything about the past, present, and future and knows it all at the same time.

While God knows everything, we must remember that He will not do anything to remove our agency so we can choose for ourselves. In March of 1839, while Joseph Smith suffered in Liberty Jail, in his misery, he cried unto the Lord of his pain and was told, "Thy days are known, and thy years shall not be numbered less."²⁰ At that time, God knew that Joseph Smith would become a martyr on June 27th, 1844. He did not just guess it, cause it, nor He did not interfere with it. Knowing that martyrdom would happen at the moment, God knew Joseph Smith would have accomplished all he needed to during his time on earth. Joseph's time on earth was not "numbered less." And although God knew that Joseph would succeed and accomplish all he was meant to do, Joseph did not know it. Joseph had to live, experience, and learn that he could submit his will to God and accomplish all he was commanded to do with faith and trust, depending on Grace from the Lord. We must learn the same.

"Given the reality of the Resurrection of Christ, doubts about the omnipotence, omniscience, and benevolence of God the Father—who gave His Only Begotten Son for the redemption of the world—are groundless. Doubts about the meaning and purpose of life are unfounded. Jesus Christ is, in fact, the only name or way by which salvation can come to mankind. The grace of Christ is real, affording both forgiveness and cleansing to the repentant sinner. Faith truly is more than imagination or psychological invention. There is ultimate and universal truth, and there are objective and unchanging moral standards, as taught by Him."²¹

The comforting doctrine of God's omniscience is that before trials ever touch our lives, He foresees them, and His plan is already in place to help us and use these trials to make us more divine. Through His omniscience, His perfect love, and the atonement of His Son, He can lead us back into His presence if we so choose. Our part is to trust Him, endure patiently, live righteously, and learn to submit our will to His.

The loss of my father to suicide is a profound sorrow; his loss will always hurt, but I have finally found comfort in understanding that devastating events are known to Him. Have you ever thought that every experience we go through in life is a stepping stone towards becoming a Celestial Being? It's fascinating to think that each challenge we face, every obstacle we overcome, and every lesson we learn is a crucial part of our journey towards enlightenment. I choose to embrace every experience we

"grow through" and keep moving forward and practice today of becoming our ultimate goal of becoming a Celestial Being. Sister Elaine S. Marshall said, "This life today is part of our eternal life and a time to practice knowing eternal joy."²² The truth of His omniscience has finally calmed waves of grief through my journey on earth and has given me an unwavering testimony in His plan of happiness.

EMBRACING THE ATONEMENT AND FINDING JOY

The greatest gift we've received is the Atonement of Jesus Christ, which brings with it myriad blessings of support and hope, among which grace stands out as especially potent and necessary in today's world. Brad Wilcox eloquently stated, "Jesus doesn't make up the difference. Jesus makes all the difference. Grace is not about filling gaps. It is about filling us."²¹ He further explained that it's through the Lord's grace that individuals gain the strength and aid to perform virtuous acts beyond what they could achieve on their own. This divine empowerment enables people to pursue eternal life and exaltation after putting forth their utmost effort. Turning to the Lord is crucial for experiencing happiness, fulfillment, and direction in our lives.

THE PATH TO CELESTIAL JOY

Since my father's untimely death, I've battled feelings of isolation and sought understanding, attempting to reconcile his actions. The profound grief that suicide imparts on those left behind is often underestimated. The emotional turmoil experienced by "survivors of suicide" is a daily challenge, misunderstood by many. Despite these emotional struggles, my faith has remained unshaken. I've committed to educating my family about the gospel and the universal solution that love provides, emanating not just from me, but also from our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.

I've discovered that serving others is a profound way to feel divine love, starting with my family and extending to anyone I can help. Service is a profound embodiment of our Savior's example and connects us with Him, especially when I feel stretched beyond my limits. Acknowledging Jesus Christ's Grace and being grateful for even the smallest blessings can bring joy into life. This doesn't mean I'm immune to depression and anxiety, but it signifies that recognizing these feelings prompts me to seek guidance from the Lord, whether it requires receiving help or offering it.

Sister Marshall also said the following four quotes in her same Devotional talk at Brigham Young University: "to live joyfully you must be brave. True joy is not for the fainthearted. You must decide to be happy. Joy is an act of courage. Joy will not abide until you make a conscious decision to treasure it." "Gratitude is the gateway to joy." "How presumptuous we are to question the trials of our lives. We are blessed to be born with the greatest daily comforts of any time or place in history. We are blessed to be here on this day to share in the feast of the word of God." And, "From a daily focus on gratitude sprung a daily dose of joy."²²

This realization is what I call JOY. Not just JOY, but J.O.Y, or putting Jesus Over Yourself. It's a powerful formula for overcoming challenges and accessing divine grace and love. JOY is a remedy for many of life's difficulties, fostering trust in God's omniscience, The Plan of Happiness, and recognizing the ultimate sacrifice our Savior made with the Atonement that blesses each of us in so many ways not only in this life, but in the life to come. J.O.Y. helps us to walk on life's pathway that allows to become sanctified, and allows us to practice living as Celestial beings in the Celestial King. Jesus Over Yourself is the answer to a successful and happy life.²³

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GENERAL CONFERENCE

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Sunday, October 6

1, 1842, included the now famous Articles of Faith. There are 13, each one expressing a belief of the newly organized Church. They have now become the official expression of Mormon doctrine.

We know little about the immediate influence of the Wentworth letter, but we do know that today thousands have read and pondered these declarations of faith. Many have examined and believed them, for they are in harmony with the Holy Bible. They reach into the heart of sectarianism; they deny the creeds of the mother church; and they strike hard at all established creeds. When the Prophet summarized the claims of the Church, he carefully avoided a dogmatic style. All in all, it is a magnificent and friendly appeal to an honest and conscientious seeker after truth.

First Article of Faith

In the first article Joseph Smith resurrects the true concept of the Godhead. It was a challenge in his day. It is still a challenge. He left no room for dispute over this important and fundamental doctrine. "We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost."

This definition of God is understandable without prolonged and tedious discussion. It reaffirms the teachings of Genesis that man is created in the image of his Maker. The vague and confused notions of Deity during the past centuries have robbed people of God's reality. A new revelation of the Godhead, such as Joseph Smith gave the world, is the only solution to the religious misunderstanding that exists throughout Christendom.

Jesus made this clear when he said: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast

#2

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#4

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completely. As both Old and New Testaments declare, "The first of all the commandments is ... thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first [and great] commandment."¹

Little wonder then that the Prophet Joseph Smith taught: "It is the first principle of the gospel to know for a certainty the character of God." "I want you all to know Him," he said, "and to be familiar with Him."² We must have "a *correct* idea of his ... perfections, and attributes," an admiration for "the excellency of [His] character."³ Thus the first phrase we utter in the declaration of our faith is, "We believe in God, the Eternal Father."⁴ So, emphatically, did Jesus. Even as He acknowledged His own singular role in the divine plan, the Savior nevertheless insisted on this prayerful preamble: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God."⁵

After generations of prophets had tried to teach the family of man the will and the way of the Father, usually with little success, God in His ultimate effort to have us know Him, sent to earth His Only Begotten and perfect Son, created in His very

Photo added by Diane & John

Wesley Egbert Polley

BIRTH 2 Mar 1912
Bisbee, Cochise County, Arizona, USA

DEATH 3 Sep 1996 (aged 84)
Arizona, USA

BURIAL Evergreen Cemetery
Bisbee, Cochise County, Arizona, USA [Add to Map](#)

PLOT General, Sec. 7, Grave 44

MEMORIAL ID 38313765 · [View Source](#)

#8

Wesley Egbert Polley.
Find A Grave.
<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/38313765/wesley-egbert-polley>

23. 2 Nephi 5:27, Mosiah 2:41, Mosiah 16:11, Alma 40:12.