

Live Like His Son

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Powerful, eternal truths are contained in the doctrine of the plan of salvation and its associated mortal path. In the scriptures, the plan is referred to as “the plan of salvation,” “the great plan of happiness,” “the plan of redemption,” and “the plan of mercy” (see *True to the Faith* [2004], 115).

We know that we are the spiritual sons and daughters of God. Before we gained our physical bodies, we were involved in a council with all of Heavenly Father's children. While participating in this council, we were taught and we accepted our Father's plan.

Even though we would become mortal, experience the weaknesses associated with a physical body, and have to withstand the temptations of the adversary, we were confident in our ability to remain faithful. We listened as our Savior, Jesus Christ, expressed His willingness to come to earth. He volunteered to come and show us the way; He would provide “the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). We would come to know the Father by looking to His Son, for They are one in purpose. He alone would have the power to lay down His life and take it up again, because He would be the Son of God and the Son of Man. Jesus Christ covenanted to be our Savior and Redeemer (see Moses 4:2; Abraham 3:27). God's prophets have revealed that we shouted for joy when we learned of Jesus Christ's willing sacrifice in our behalf (see Job 38:7). And Jesus humbly declared that through it all, the glory would be the Father's.

Satan rejected the Father's plan and rebelled. He sought to disallow the law of agency and to claim all the glory. Fortunately, we chose to follow Heavenly Father's plan.

We were forewarned: life's mortal journey, or path, would be challenging. We would make mistakes. But through Christ's selfless sacrifice, when we committed sin, we could repent, change, seek forgiveness, and become clean again. We would exercise our agency in choosing righteousness, choosing to follow Jesus Christ, and rejecting Satan.

We are now experiencing mortality. Our spirit is united with a mortal, physical body. We are faced with opportunities to exercise our agency daily, and we strive to follow Jesus Christ by making correct choices.

Sister Rosemary Wixom spoke at BYU's Women's Conference as the newly called general Primary president. I loved her message. She taught about the plan and our journey on this mortal path. She encouraged us to *stay on the path* and help others remain on the path back to our Heavenly Father. She then demonstrated this truth with a simple hand action: "I will stay on the path back to my Heavenly Father" ("The Plan of Salvation: One of Heaven's Best Gifts to Mankind," BYU Women's Conference, Apr. 29, 2011, 9). When I copied her actions, I felt the Spirit confirm to me the promise I made in premortal realms: "Yes, I will stay on the path back to my Heavenly Father."

All of us made this promise. Now the question is, how will we fulfill it? The answer is that we will exercise faith in our Savior Jesus Christ and the plan. We will accept His gospel and keep His commandments. When we sin, we will repent. We will accept and honor sacred ordinances and covenants: first, baptism, and second, sacred temple ordinances and covenants. We will choose to accept the Holy Ghost and keep ourselves worthy of His constant companionship. We will endure and serve until we complete our mortal probation. We understand that opposition is necessary to develop spiritual strength, and we are willing to withstand this as we choose to follow our Savior, Jesus Christ. We look forward to the day when we will humbly return to the presence of the Father and His Son and receive our promised reward, exaltation.

I have just shared with you the Sunday School and Young Women version of the plan of salvation. I believe it. I love it. I teach it. And I strive to live in such a way so as to achieve its ultimate promises. There's just one problem. *It is a lot harder than it sounds.*

My friend, *my* Young Women leader, has experienced multiple challenges in her 70 years of mortality. She is remarkable. Long ago she said to me, "Ann, I know I heard all that would be expected of me, and I willingly accepted what would be required as explained in that premortal council. But sometimes I wonder if instead of listening to the plan and what would be expected of me, I was talking!"

I know we may at times *think* this, but it is not true. We knew, we accepted, and we were confident in our ability to succeed. We rejoiced. We came to this earth so that we might gain experience. *Hearing* about an experience and *actually having it* are two very different things! I believe that in our *innocence*, we *thought* we understood all that our mortal journey would require of us. We did not. We could not fully understand until we'd actually *experienced* it for ourselves.

I came to a new understanding of the importance of gaining experience as I read the book *The Diaries of Adam and Eve*, translated by Mark Twain. In this short book, feelings and experiences that may have taken place are recounted. I was moved by what Eve may have felt after leaving the Garden. Eve shares: "We were ignorant then; we are rich in learning now—ah, how rich! We know hunger, thirst and cold; we know pain, disease, and grief; we know hate, rebellion, and deceit; we know remorse, . . . we know weariness of body and spirit, the unrefreshing sleep, the rest which rests not, the dreams which restore Eden, and banish it again with the waking; . . . we know right from wrong, . . . we know all the rich product of the Moral Sense, and it is our possession. Would we could sell it for one hour of Eden and white purity. . . . We have it all—that treasure" (Mark Twain, *Diaries of Adam and Eve* [2009], 61–62).

In Moses 5:10–12, we read our first parents' learnings. Adam declares, "Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God."

“And Eve, his wife, heard all these things and was glad, saying: Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient.”

“And Adam and Eve blessed the name of God, and they made all things known unto their sons and their daughters.”

When we think of the path, we may think of a straight, level road. Or we may think of a road that forks into two, forcing us to choose between them. We're all familiar with Robert Frost's poetic lines: “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference” (in *Mountain Interval* [1916], 9).

The idea Mr. Frost beautifully brings to life in this poem, that of choosing your own path, is an important one. We are all trying to stay on the path that leads back to our Heavenly Father. But sometimes, by my own choice, I may wander from “the path” and find my road unpleasant, unsightly, or even closed. Sometimes I find myself on a bumpy, challenging road I *didn't* consciously choose. Whether by our own choices or circumstances out of our control, the journey, at times, is difficult and threatens mortal and eternal consequences. Some paths are frightening and dangerous, with serious inclines. There are chains mounted in the rocks nearby in order to give me something to hold on to during my ascent. Some of us may fall while traveling the path. Is all of this effort and challenge necessary? Yes, it is, because this is the way we are refined and strengthened. This is how we become fit and prepared for the next mountain, which we will soon have the opportunity to climb and enjoy incredible vistas. This is the way we become who God knows we can become.

For some, the path may be like that dreaded childhood game “Chutes and Ladders.” We travel so far and get so close—only to tumble downward as though falling into an abyss. However, it is when we are in the abyss, looking upward to the light of Christ through the darkness, that we begin to hear the voice of the Lord and heed the promptings of the Holy Ghost. All pride is suddenly stripped away, and we begin to acquire the Christlike attribute of humility. Now we are willing to submit our will and accept His ever-outstretched hand. In hardship, our hearts are softened and changed, and we begin to see with spiritual eyes the end we earnestly seek and how to get there.

Consider our individual lives, the road each of us is traveling. No two roads look exactly alike. Look around at the women assembled in this hall. Standing up here, I think you look perfect. You could be on the cover of the *Ensign* or *Liahona*! Just looking at you, it seems *your* path is perfect. *You probably know differently.* For a moment, let's participate in a brief little activity. Please lower your head and close your eyes. I'm going to name a few concerns that may affect you. When I say something that applies to you, will you raise your hand? Keep your hand upheld until I tell you to lower it. Remember, eyes closed.

Let's begin. Raise your hand if your family has been affected by financial troubles. Loss of employment? Raise your hand if you haven't had the opportunity to be sealed to a righteous companion. Have you experienced health challenges, physical or emotional? Infertility? The effects of aging? Raise your hand if your family has been affected by anything that is not considered virtuous, lovely, of good report, or praiseworthy. Has your family been affected by someone's unrighteous use of agency or selfishness? Dishonesty? Even simple poor judgment? Have you had problems with your children, spouse, parents, or siblings? Raise your hand if someone in your family has experienced loss of personal testimony. Gender challenges? The

death of a loved one? Do you ever feel lonely or overwhelmed? Have you needed to repent or practice forgiveness? Raise your hand if you feel you have not received blessings you feel you have earned through your personal righteousness. Raise your hand if your amazing 18-year-old child did not get accepted to BYU. And finally, raise your hand if you feel, at times, as though your heart has been broken.

Sisters, keep your hands up, but raise your head and open your eyes. Look around and observe those assembled in this hall. You may now lower your hands.

It would probably be easier for me to ask, "Raise your hand if your life is perfect, turning out just as you'd hoped for and planned." Now if by some minute chance you are getting ready to raise your hand, don't—this could clearly be injurious to your health and safety!

I want to thank the sisters for singing one of my favorite Primary songs, "He Sent His Son." Frequently when I have a question or have struggles, I'll stop and think, "What am I to do? How will I solve this problem? How will I endure what I'm called upon to endure, travel this path I'm expected to traverse and do so successfully?" For me, the answer lies within the words of this song: "Have faith, have hope, live like his Son, help others on their way. . . . Live like his Son" ("He Sent His Son," *Children's Songbook*, 34–35).

When I doubt my abilities to follow those words, I find myself asking another question: "Is there no other way?" I love the counsel Alma gives to his son Shiblon: "And now, my son, I have told you this that ye may learn wisdom, that ye may learn of me that there is no other way or means whereby man can be saved, only in and through Christ. Behold, he is the life and the light of the world. Behold, he is the word of truth and righteousness" (Alma 38:9). And so, because there is no other way to return to our Heavenly Father than in and through Christ, we must submit our personal will, be obedient, and press forward. The words from the song that encourage me so well can serve as guideposts along our way, no matter how difficult the path.

First, "Have faith."

We know faith is a principle that requires action, effort, and obedience. Elder L. Whitney Clayton teaches: "Faith . . . is a spiritual gift. Faith increases when we not only hear, but act on the word of God as well, in obedience to the truths we have been taught" ("Help Thou Mine Unbelief," *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 28). Nephi taught that all must come to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior. "And that he manifesteth himself unto all those who believe in him, by the power of the Holy Ghost; yea, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, working mighty miracles, signs, and wonders, among the children of men according to their faith" (2 Nephi 26:13).

However, at times we may identify more with the humbling story of the man who sought Christ's healing power for his son and possibly himself. We read in Mark the account of the father who pleaded, "But if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:22–24). And the Savior healed the son. Have faith.

Second, "Have hope."

Hope, too, is a spiritual gift. We have hope when we trust in God's promises (see *True to the Faith* [2004], 85–86). Hope is based on our *experience*. One way our hope is strengthened is by choosing to act on the teachings of prophets, ancient and modern day. Moroni taught, “Whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God” (Ether 12:4). Paul taught: “We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Romans 5:3–5).

President Uchtdorf frequently bears testimony concerning the necessity of having hope. He has said, “Hope is not knowledge, but rather the abiding trust that the Lord will fulfill His promise to us” (“Infinite Power of Hope,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2008, 2). It was revealed to Joseph Smith while in Liberty Jail, “My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment” (D&C 121:7). Have hope.

Third, “Live like His Son.”

The surest guide to help us on our mortal path is our Savior's perfect example. Jesus Christ glorified his Father through His constant obedience. I love the simple but powerful counsel the Savior provided to His disciples and to us: “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). The Savior loved His Father, and He kept His Father's commandments. The Savior loves us. He was honest in keeping His covenants with Heavenly Father and with us by fulfilling the Infinite Atonement. He kept the commandments, and so must we.

The recently revised *For the Strength of Youth* contains the Ten Commandments as well as the two “great commandments.” They are found on page 44 (see *For the Strength of Youth* [2011], 44). Both provide the foundation of moral law. They are eternal gospel principles that are necessary for our peace and happiness now and for eternity (see “Obedience,” *True to the Faith* [2004], 108).

Jesus taught the Ten Commandments in His Sermon on the Mount. He summarized them when He responded to the pointed question offered by the young lawyer, who said, tempting him. “Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:36–40).

All prophets teach of the importance of obeying God's commandments. President Thomas S. Monson is no exception. In his address “May You Have Courage,” he quoted Mr. Ted Koppel: “What Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai were not the Ten Suggestions, they are commandments. *Are*, not *were*” (Ted Koppel, Duke University commencement address, 1987; quoted in Thomas S. Monson, “May You Have Courage,” *Ensign*, May 2009, 125; italics added). Keeping the commandments is a sure way to stay firmly anchored on the right path.

Our final guide is “Help others on their way.”

It is our responsibility and privilege to help others who share or cross our path. We are called upon to “strengthen [our] brethren” (Luke 22:32) and “lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees” (D&C 81:5). We do not always choose who accompanies us on our path or the lessons we must learn through our shared experience. Many times we walk with people who stretch our capacity, understanding, abilities, and patience. In times like these, we truly must seek the Savior’s enabling power.

Conversely, there are times when we cross paths with individuals who seem to be answers to our prayers, literally the angels promised to bear us up (see D&C 88:84). It is a blessing to experience each of these moments.

On our journeys, we may hunger for a simple expression of acknowledgement and encouragement. May I suggest, never forget the power of sending a note to someone expressing your sincere, specific thoughts and love. I heard Elder Jeffrey R. Holland relate, “Remember, in order to receive a note, you have to send a note. It’s just the way it works.” While preparing this talk, I re-read some of the notes I have received. My tears flowed, and my feelings of love increased—love not only for the friend who wrote the note but also for my Heavenly Father. It was as though in receiving and re-reading the note, I was reminded that He is ever watchful over me. He watched over me by prompting a friend to write a note.

Statements, mantras, or family expressions can also buoy us up. When I am challenged, I sometimes think of the statement from the movie spoof *Galaxy Quest*: “Never give up. Never surrender” (“Galaxy Quest,” imdb.com). Recently, I learned that a woman in Florida bore her testimony of the comfort she received when she heard President Monson’s simple words of encouragement in general conference. She said, “‘Life by the yard is hard. By the inch, it’s a cinch.’ I’ve been saying this statement aloud multiple times each day, and it seems as though my burdens have become lighter!” Once when I was traveling with my father to the Gila Valley Arizona Temple dedication, a woman shared her grandmother’s favorite expression, “Just focus on the gospel. This, too, shall pass.” These statements contain reassuring words that help us on our way.

When we help others, we exhibit charity, the pure love of Christ, which we know “never faileth” (see Moroni 7:46). An upbeat hymn reminds me to have charity, and it immediately makes me think of my father: “Scatter sunshine all along your way. Cheer and bless and brighten ev’ry passing day” (*Hymns*, no. 230). President Monson has taught, “There is a serious need for the charity that gives attention to those who are unnoticed, hope to those who are discouraged, aid to those who are afflicted. True charity is love in action. The need for charity is everywhere” (“Charity Never Faileth,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 124).

I can testify that President Monson doesn’t simply teach of charity; he lives it. I’ll share two simple interactions. My husband Roger is a CPA and has just completed yet another tax season. One of his clients, a 74-year-old widow, shared, “You know, I’m not a member of your church, but I met your father-in-law. I saw him in the hallway at a Jazz game, and he said hello and shook my hand. My daughter joined your church, and she can’t believe *my* luck in meeting the prophet.” The woman then said about President Monson: “He’s a friendly fellow, isn’t he?” Yes, he is.

About a month ago, I accompanied my father to church in his home ward, the ward where I grew up. After a wonderful sacrament meeting, my father was walking to his car. Outside came two little boys, maybe four years old. You could tell they were glad to be out of church. Their shirts

were unbuttoned, and their ties hung loose and crooked. No parents were present. There were no cameras. One boy cautiously approached President Monson and asked, "Can you wiggo yo ears?" My father looked a bit confused; I could sense he didn't understand what the little boy had said. I translated for him and waited. My father said nothing, so I looked over and saw that dad was wiggling his ears. The little boy smiled broadly, turned to his friend, and said, "See, he can wiggo his ears." Happily, they ran away. It was such a sweet little moment. President Monson happily helps people on their way, whether they're 74 or 4, and we can too.

God the Father's eternal plan of salvation is real. We are all living it as we travel our individual mortal path: learning, choosing, praying, serving, loving, repenting, forgiving, experiencing sorrow and pain, and experiencing joy. It may be difficult at times, but we will not let temporary discouragement overcome us. We must do as the grandmother in Arizona counseled, "Just focus on the gospel. This, too, shall pass."

Let us each choose to believe and follow our Savior. He teaches us to be of good cheer. He shows us the way; He is the truth and the life. May we continually move forward on our path, having faith and hope, living like His Son, and helping others on their way as we journey to our promised eternal joy, our peace and exaltation, in my humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.