

Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee

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I am convinced that the very thought of Jesus can change us. Let me explain.

In the spring of 1988 I had a unique experience. I was invited to teach the life of Christ in a classroom on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. For a year I had been teaching Old Testament at the BYU Jerusalem Center, but now I was to teach of Christ's life directly. I had little time, and I knew I must prepare.

I sensed that this would be one of the most important experiences of my life. And it was. From the time I awoke each morning until I slept each night I was focused on Jesus Christ. There were ways in which I felt that I knew him there for the first time, though I already knew how it felt to love him.

When my two weeks of round-the-clock preparing and teaching ended, I wrote in my journal:

"April 11, 1988.

"As I sit here I recall the glorious hours of study I spent . . . in a small, pre-fab cabin [which became a holy place to me]. . . . I spent every waking hour earnestly preparing and alternately gazing out our picture window at the many moods of this lake. I was filled almost continually with a spirit which is difficult to describe. I was [totally] immersed in the study of Christ's life—so much of which was lived nearby.

"I knelt each dawn before that picture window—before His sea—to plead for His Spirit to direct and organize my study efforts that day. Three hours each morning I would teach. *Each* time I felt helped. There were a few days when I felt so humble, so inadequate, and these were the very times when I was "added upon," when the Spirit made me equal to the task, adding a dimension which was missing in me. The students were so intent on learning and growing that I became an instrument to help. It was a heavenly experience.

"As I look back, I realize how profoundly my understanding was enhanced and my

soul expanded. The in-depth study of Jesus was a monumental, marathon task and remains unfinished. I must do much more! [I realize now that it will only be finished when I meet Him face to face.]"

My ten- to twelve-hour study days on the shores of the Galilee changed me forever. I could identify with Nephi when he exclaimed, "We are made alive in Christ because of our faith. . . . And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ" (2 Nephi 25:25–26). I had come to know Jesus quietly and deeply in new ways.

I know you cannot travel to Israel to duplicate my Galilee experience. How I wish you could! But just as surely as he walked that shore, and that I traced his footsteps there nearly two thousand years later, you must have your own sweet encounters with Jesus Christ. Your experience will differ from mine. You must find him in your own way and in your own place. The gateway to such an experience is the scriptures.

You remember when he walked on that water and beckoned to Peter. "It is I;" he said, "be not afraid." And Peter answered him, "If it be thou, bid me come unto thee." And Jesus said, "Come" (Matthew 14:27–29).

So many times he has bid us to come.

In latter-day scripture he invites us: "Learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit, and you shall have peace in me. I am Jesus Christ; I came by the will of the Father, and I do his will" (D&C 19:23–24).

He invites us to walk with him, to remember him in all the moments of our lives. "Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not" (D&C 6:36). I know that that remembering, promised each time we take the sacrament, adds his power to our resolve. Thus we grow towards receiving his "image in [our] countenances" (Alma 5:14), and, over time, a mighty change can take place in our hearts.

We can only remember someone we have known. "For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart?" (Mosiah 5:13). It was my new discoveries about Jesus moment by moment through study and prayer near Galilee which gave me so much more to remember.

May I speak to you as I would to a dear friend, just the two of us, sharing with the help of the Spirit what we remember about Jesus? I will be speaking aloud, but please let my words be catalysts for what is already in your mind and heart.

I remember his finding moments to be alone. I remember his weeping. I remember his healing, always healing. I remember how he met temptation and paid no heed to it. I remember how he gave himself over and over again and finally completely. I remember how he called the children to him and blessed them. I remember how he urges us to be one. In all these rememberings, I find indelibly in my heart the memory of his unfailing, everlasting

love, his tenderness and caring. All were alike to him. No matter where you find yourself at this moment, he loves you. He loves each of us.

Six hundred years before Jesus was born on this earth, he told Jeremiah: "Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you" (Jeremiah 29:13–14).

I know we can trust that promise. Let us search together, remembering how he lived, and examine the ways we can trace his steps.

I remember how Jesus made time to be alone, to pray. So can we. I learned some of that, on the shores of Galilee: "And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. And they departed into a [solitary] place" (Mark 6:31–32; JST, Mark 6:32–33).

We can identify with dashing around in our busy lives, having no leisure so much as to eat, can't we? Jesus often pulled away to rest and pray: forty days in the Judean desert after his baptism; all night before he called his apostles; later on a high mountain with Peter, James, and John—his Father filled him, and them, with glory and knowledge; and finally in Gethsemane.

Such rest and prayer time require privacy. These moments can be sliced out of our busy days. This kind of communing takes time. It is more than just reaching up; it is our bright awareness of his reaching down. Isaiah describes this over and over: "His hand is stretched out still"; and the Book of Mormon echoes: "Mine arm is lengthened out all the day long" (Isaiah 5:25; 9:12; 2 Nephi 28:32). He constantly reaches for us. We need only look up and take his hand.

When Jesus was baptized, his father reached down, announcing who he really was. The original Greek reads: "This is my Son, the Beloved One, in whom I take delight." Can you imagine how Jesus felt at those words? We can feel something akin to this. We can merit our Father's approval through our obedience, sensing his delight in us, as we struggle daily to come closer to him. Remember, Jesus said, "It is I; be not afraid. . . . Come!" (Matthew 14:27–29).

Sister Pat Holland pleaded with us from this very pulpit last year to simplify our days, to find a quiet time and place to be with our Heavenly Father regularly. How can we ever learn to be like him if we only wave as we pass?

Sister Holland described the setting for real communion: "Allow yourself to turn a few things down and turn a few things off. . . . Stop what you are so frantically doing. . . . Position yourself calmly, quietly in humble serenity until your prayer flows naturally, lovingly. . . . when you feel he is with you, you are filled with a wonderful strength that will allow you to do anything in righteousness" (Patricia T. Holland, "Filled with All the Fulness of God," in *Clothed with Charity: Talks from the 1996 Women's Conference*, ed. Dawn Hall

Anderson, Susette Fletcher Green, and Dlora Hall Dalton [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997], 11).

When can we pull away for time with our Father? Where is our "place apart"?

You are the only one who can answer that. But he has given all of us a precious time. It has been there all along. Remember? "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). He himself rests and on the Sabbath invites us to join him.

I love the Sabbath day. I learned to love it even more living among the Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem. It has been said that not only have the Jews kept the Sabbath but the Sabbath has kept the Jews. I felt a kind of holy envy for the quiet, kept Sabbaths I experienced living in Jerusalem. Judaism teaches that "the Sabbath itself is a sanctuary which we build, *a sanctuary in time*" (Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* [1951, 1986], 29).

I find it exciting to think of walling off that one day each week. (You can tell I don't have any little children at home, but you will all get to be my age some time.) Wall off that day each week, like a building, a temple, and, after entering it, practice holiness in a day which was constructed for that very purpose.

When I awake early Sunday morning, the day seems totally different to me. I instinctively whisper, "Thank you." Then, on my knees, I take my gratitude, my sins, my petitions, my temptations, and my deepest desires to our Father with ample time before anyone in my household stirs. I find there is not nearly enough time during the sacrament song and prayers and the passing of the bread and water to speak all I need to speak or to listen long enough to hear what I need to hear.

Later, when I hear the words of the sacrament prayers spoken, my heart is prepared and waiting. These lines I wrote a few years ago express my feelings during this sacred time. I call it "The Sacrament Prayers":

*The words are repeated
once again
this sacred, Sabbath time.
Words I can trace
through the week
but this time
unique,
spoken quietly
in youthful
intonation
and the nourishment
is proffered
to me
by a boy's hand*

*in exchange
for
my changing.*

There is something that feels so fresh and clean about the young men who bless the sacrament in my ward. I love to hear their clear voices. And those earnest boys who offer me the bread and water—their hands seem unsoiled to me. Sharing this sacred experience with them is a high point of my week. My husband, Truman, and I have always taken each other's hand during the sacrament, but now he serves as a stake president, and I am ordinarily taking the sacrament by myself. Many of you know this feeling. I have learned from this aloneness a new kind of connection with the Lord, which I cherish. I reach heavenward with all my heart and feel understood and loved. Suddenly, the burdens of the past week are gone or lightened. I feel fortified to meet the new week's challenges—fresh and clean.

We can each learn to build our own "sanctuar[ies] in time," even beyond Sunday. You must find time. It may be late into the night, in those glorious hours while you wait anxiously for your teenagers to come home. It may be just after your children leave for school. (Another glorious time of day.) Start small. Take fifteen minutes before you tear into those items to be checked off on your list. Could it be while you nurse the baby, which could be any time, night or day? I used that precious time with my babies. I felt I was sharing my soul with them. It's your choice, but choose a time.

One Sabbath in March 1994, I sat in our chapel waiting to partake of the sacrament. I remembered how Jesus forgave and forgives. I was deep in prayer when these words came to me with such clarity that I wrote them down, and I keep them in my scriptures:

"Forgiveness is one of our tasks as we partake of the sacrament. If we would be forgiven, we must, ourselves, forgive. To truly forgive, I must identify the hurt, the pain—honestly, not denying it—and then offer that pain as a willing sacrifice to God. Then it can disappear. Once I've given it away, my attitude toward the person who inflicted it is also changed; no grievance or wound remains, and he/she can be seen in a new Light. The other person need do nothing for this to happen. It is in my heart that the 'mighty change' can take place."

Three years later, almost to the day when I wrote those lines, I had a remarkable temple recommend interview with my bishop. I recorded in my journal not too long ago:

"I had decided to ask his counsel as I tried to forgive someone for long-ago pain and hurt. I had the sense as I brought up the subject that the bishop was reaching up in prayer to know how to teach me. [That was a wonderful moment.] We spoke [only a] few words, but he seemed to understand exactly how I was troubled. [I explained] that [even though] the person had been dead for several years, I knew I couldn't ignore the problem any longer. He spoke with me of mercy, pity. I said I had tried to feel that and I was still trying.

"At one point he looked me straight in the eye and said that I should just do it, just

let go and forgive, that I needn't keep trying but that I should just do it. It was like he opened a door for me and beckoned me to come through, not waiting a moment.

"Just before I left he said, 'Ann, you have been badly hurt and have been carrying that around with you all these years. [I remember thinking, compared to others', my hurt is small, but because I nurtured it, it has grown. In my mind I pictured a bundle of pain about the size of a basketball.] Just then he said, 'Throw it away!' [and I figured I was in tune] and added, 'You say to yourself, "Someone should have to pay for this. It isn't fair." But, Ann, someone *has* paid for it.' I knew immediately that he meant the Savior, and I wondered how I had been so dense for so long, and I began to cry. I remembered the paper I had kept in my scriptures, my personal revelation, that I had been inspired to write down during that sacrament service in March of 1994, and I went home and reread it:

"Forgiveness is one of our tasks as we partake of the sacrament. If we would be forgiven, we must, ourselves, forgive. To truly forgive, I must identify the hurt, the pain . . . and then offer [it] as a willing sacrifice to God. [And so on, ending with:] It is in my heart that the 'mighty change' can take place."

Then I realized that the Lord had told me once, all by myself, sitting, waiting to partake of his sacred sacrament, and that the bishop had gotten the same message to give to me again. This time I could hear and understand. How patiently God ministers to us in our need, quietly repeating over and over again, until we have ears to hear and hearts broken enough to understand.

How do we forgive those who we feel have sinned against us? Dennis Rasmussen teaches us one way: "Evil multiplies by the response it seeks to provoke, and when I return evil for evil, I engender corruption myself. The chain of evil is broken for good when a pure and loving heart absorbs a hurt and forbears to hurt in return."

Brother Rasmussen continues: "The forgiveness of Christ bears no grudge. The love of Christ allows no offense to endure. The compassion of Christ embraces all things and draws them toward himself. Deep within every child of God the Light of Christ resides, guiding, comforting, purifying the heart that turns to him" (*The Lord's Question* [Provo: Keter Foundation, 1985], 63–64).

We can turn to him.

Professor Terry Warner taught me from this pulpit: "He outlasted all provocations. . . . He absorbed the terrible poison of vengeance into himself and metabolized it by his love" ("Honest, Simple, Solid, True," in *Brigham Young Magazine*, June 1996, 35).

What a concept! Metabolize our pain by our increasing capacity to love! Imagine! We can join Christ in his merciful task of remembering sins no more. Carol Lynn Pearson explains this so well in her poem called "The Forgiving":

Forgive?

*Will I forgive,
You cry.
But
What is the gift,
The favor?
You would lift
Me from
My poor place
To stand beside
The Savior.
You would have
Me see with
His eyes,
Smile,
And with Him
Reach out to
Salve
A sorrowing heart—
For one small
Moment
To share in
Christ's great art.
Will I forgive,
You cry.
Oh,
May I—
May I?*

(In Beginnings [Provo: Trilogy Arts, 1967], 35; used by permission)

Many times I use these words to remind me when I can find no desire to forgive.
"May I— / May I?"

I remember Jesus wept with the broken-hearted and healed the sick and the sorrowing. So can we. He wept, overlooking Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matthew 23:37). What sadness he reflects in this lament! It is akin to his cry in Isaiah: "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?" (Isaiah 5:4).

On the other side of the Mount of Olives, he wept with his dear friends Mary and Martha just before he raised their brother, Lazarus. Before the miracle he wept with them in their sorrow, in their pain. We can do that. Later he wept, kneeling with the Nephites, a glorious resurrected personage. What caused his tears in this setting? Joy. "My joy is full,"

he said: joy in their faithfulness, their righteousness (3 Nephi 17:20–21).

He was sensitive to those who surrounded him, sometimes crowding so closely that he might have felt smothered. Remember the woman who touched his clothing in such a crowd and drew virtue from him? Remember the children, whom he invited to come closer when others would have pushed them away? He knew they could know purely, guilelessly, and he opened himself to them so that they would. Such sweet patterns of compassion for us to follow.

We can weep with the sorrowing, the fearful, the depressed, those whose lives have been split apart by the death of a loved one or divorce. "What can I do?" a mother asked a weeping child. "You can cry with me!" To turn the tables, my son, Barney, called me one morning when my mother was dying and said, "Mom, I'm sorry to be in Texas instead of there with you." I said my only problem was that I just couldn't stop crying, I wanted to cry all the time. He answered simply, "Go ahead and cry, Mom." So I did. And so did he. It's amazingly easy to cry "long distance."

Can we remember our own past pain long enough to patiently tend those whose pain is in the present? Jesus did and does. So can we. We can offer some of our present strength to those who feel weak and unable to cope. We can mourn with them, and we can lift them a little, day by day, until they have found the strength to stand again.

I remember Jesus healing, always healing. He went about healing, not hurting. He took those who came to him by their hands and lifted them up. The crowds that swirled around him always included those coming to be healed—the sick, the lame—whom some perceived as ugly, stinking, and misshapen. He did not recoil from them.

What did he see? He saw the beauty of the human spirit in those who were unwhole, unfinished. We can pray to see as he sees. "Be thou whole," he said (John 5:6). He comes, indeed, with the power to make us whole. He healed sickness and sin interchangeably. When the leper called out to him, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," he touched the untouchable and answered, "I will; be thou clean!" (Matthew 8:2–3).

Can we touch the untouchable? Can we see beneath the ugliness of sin, the radiance that repentance can produce? He could. So can we.

Jesus healed and sent his apostles and the seventy to heal. Healing defined his mission. He has delegated his gentle, healing, priesthood power to the men among us so that they might join him in fashioning his miracles, implementing his will, anointing all of us to wholeness.

He asks us, as women, to follow him and to do as he did. We were born with the capacity to heal and soothe and lift, to "succor the weak" (D&C 81:5). How often we sense the need to soothe those around us! We know almost instinctively how to minister and heal through our loving touch. Every woman has knelt at the side of a child, perhaps not her own, to "kiss a hurt better." "Here, let me kiss it better!" It works. Why? Is it because feeling

loved makes everything feel better? Even a tiny girl child knows the secret.

Our youngest daughter, when she was about two years old, caught her hand in our old Ironrite as the motor was on and the roller was rolling. Her tiny hand was badly friction burned. As I heard her cry and ran to free her hand and gather her up in my arms, I wept as I saw the wound and blamed myself for her pain. I rushed her to a basin and ran cold water over the burn, all the time sobbing until I became aware that she wasn't crying but was wiping away my tears and whispering, "Don't cry, Mommy. Look, I'll kiss it better." And she did. So can we.

I remember how Jesus experienced temptation and paid no heed to it. He exemplified the counsel of James: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). We can learn to be drawn to righteousness, repelled by evil. Eventually we can lose all desire for sin. To do that we must educate our desires towards righteousness. Jesus can help us in this, too.

He taught us to pray with sincere intent: "Suffer [me] not to be led into temptation, but deliver [me] from evil" (JST, Matthew 6:14). Lead me, instead, away from temptation and into harmony with thy will so that I can be an instrument in thy hands. This is the decisive moment in our prayers when we ask to be led away from temptation and into righteousness. It is at this moment we make the decision to walk away from the darkness into his light.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell has said: "What we are speaking about is so much more than merely deflecting temptations for which we somehow do not feel responsible. Remember, it is our own desires which determine the sizing and attractiveness of temptations. We set our own thermostats as to temptation" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 27).

I know this is true. We may be enticed in opposite directions in a tug-of-war between light and darkness, but we are always the tie-breakers. The choice is always yours and mine. We can always move away from the darkness, even when we can't see the light clearly, just as Elder Maxwell explains: "There remains an inner zone in which we are sovereign, unless we abdicate. In this zone lies the essence of our individuality and personal accountability.

"Each assertion of a righteous desire . . . however small . . . adds to our spiritual momentum. . . . Our loving Lord will work with us, 'even if [we] can [do] no more than desire to believe,' providing we will 'let this desire work in [us]' (Alma 32:27)" (ibid., 26).

It seems clear that we can win against temptation, even before we enter the battle, by educating the desires of our hearts. Thus, the battle can be won before we find ourselves muddled in the trenches. If it is so easy, why don't we all just decide right now to do it? Because it is not easy; it is hard. Our souls are the battleground where Satan seeks to destroy our agency while the Lord fights to teach us to "bridle all [our] passions" (Alma 38:12) to be filled with his love. On this planet, created for this purpose, we experience our way through a jungle of good and evil, making choices that can ultimately exalt us. But it is seldom easy.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland put these feelings into words: "On some of your more difficult or disappointing days you will ask, 'Why is it so hard . . . ?' Answer: Because salvation is not a cheap experience. It is achieved out of the anguish of the human heart, reflecting at least in some small part Christ's suffering and sacrifice in our behalf. No one who understands the Savior's agony can think sin and error are overcome easily. But when we are making our best effort, that's when the angels come. Our success is as certain as it is difficult" (address to prospective missionaries [Provo: Brigham Young University, 6 Nov. 1996]; used by permission). I know this is true; the angels do come. We receive tangible help.

I remember that Jesus prayed for us to be one, to be bound to one another by love.

Satan seeks to isolate us, to separate us from God and each other, while Jesus taught us to be one, supporting one another in our feeblest attempts at godliness. "If ye are not one ye are not mine," he said (D&C 38:27).

We learn more about this unity in the temple and through kept covenants. Not long ago, on our way home from the cannery—this is a good reason to go to the cannery, so you can be with your grown-up children—Emily, our eldest daughter, shared a glorious idea with me. The idea was that temple covenants are ultimately shared and unite us in wonderful, unspoken ways.

"When I am not in the temple," she said, "when I am just walking down the street, I pass by people who share my covenants. All over the world there are such people, millions of us. We may not speak of it. In fact, there is much of it of which I can never speak. But there it is, just the same, in my heart and in their hearts. I am never alone."

As we gather in this conference, thousands of us from across the earth, let us remember the graciousness of God in allowing us to qualify through personal righteousness for covenants which bind us to him and to each other through love. It is an evidence of our covenant keeping that, although our critics have chosen to broadcast, inaccurately, the words used in our temples, we, who hold them sacred, choose to keep them in our hearts. It makes no difference to us what others may publish or proclaim. We have come to understand virtue, integrity, and what it means to be trusted.

So we link our arms in a covenant circle of righteousness, bound by love to each other and to God. This became so real to me a few weeks ago. Just after a baby had been blessed in our fast meeting, a sister in our ward stood to bear testimony and said with great feeling that the circle of priesthood that had surrounded that infant symbolically formed a circle of protection against evil throughout that child's life. In my heart I echoed a resounding yes. I left that meeting to rush across town to be a witness as our grandson Robby was ordained a priest. Another circle formed around him. His two brothers, his father, who was also his bishop, and his grandfather (my husband) closed that circle, and his father began, "We, your family, lay our hands upon your head . . ." You can picture them, one hand on his head, one hand on a shoulder, forming a solid ring. For me it was symbolic of linking our arms in circles of righteousness, bound to each other with an unspoken

covenant of love and support—or was it spoken when his bishop/father said, "We, your family . . ." Our families are linked forever by covenant.

I remember how tenderly Jesus taught us of the covenant of love. Jesus loves us. He taught his apostles, "As I have loved you, love one another." It sounds so simple a thing until we consider the quality of his love and surely he would have us learn to love as he loves us. "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

How does his love differ from ours or from what we call love? Sometimes we say or mean, "I will love you if . . ." or "I love you because . . ."—both qualifiers. Christ shows us how to say, "I love and will love you in spite of . . ." That is the quality of Christ's love. The scriptures give it a special name: charity. It is pure and tender. It is eternal, not pretended, totally sincere, without guile or artifice, not selective, no respecter of persons. Sometimes what we call love is demanding, dominating, or manipulative. But his is selfless; free of ego needs, facing outward, not inward; reaching always outward. If we love in this way, we avoid much disappointment, pain, despair, and we experience more true joy. Sometimes there are those around us whom we love less. We can learn to love them more. Christ loves everybody more. So can we.

I remember how Jesus gave himself for us. He taught us about sacrifice and consecration based on a spirit of obedience. A mission president's wife, one of my dearest friends, recently wrote from her mission: "I'm feeling the desire to be perfectly obedient to the Lord. Everything that matters seems to hinge on the choice to be obedient. Obedience to the Lord unlocks the experiencing of the Lord's love (see John 15)."

She went on to quote Elder Henry B. Eyring, whom she had recently heard say: "The choice to obey brings the Spirit. When I obey, I feel the Spirit; when I feel the Spirit, I feel clean; when I feel clean, I know the Atonement is working in me" (used by permission).

Obedience is the one gift we can give God. The giving of it can eventually result in our will being swallowed up in his. Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught us so memorably: "The submission of one's will is really the only truly uniquely personal thing we have to place on God's altar. . . . It is the only possession which is ours to give.

"Consecration thus constitutes the only unconditional surrender which is also a total victory" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1995, 30).

Consecration is an expression of mature love. As I consecrate, I ask myself, What has the Lord blessed me with? and then, How can I contribute these blessings to build his kingdom?

Once when I was studying Ephesians 5, I saw something I had not seen before. Paul was listing ways to come closer to God. "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (New International Version, Ephesians 5:21). Then he writes of how husbands and wives

are to give themselves: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for [it]" (NIV, Ephesians 5:25; "up" is in the original Greek). Giving ourselves up is the pattern we learn from Jesus.

This kind of giving or submitting is not "giving in," where one wins and one loses. It is giving oneself *up*. Can you see the difference?

How do we give ourselves up? One kindness at a time. Forgiving each offense as it occurs, or, better still, not taking offense. As Sister Elaine Jack taught us: "If people drop an offense, don't pick it up!" We give ourselves up by looking outward more, inward less; losing our lives in the concerns of others, rather than our own; just letting go of our self-serving, proud impulses.

Perhaps telling you of a tender moment in my life when this came clear will help. Truman and I had disagreed strenuously (I decided to say that instead of that we had had a terrible fight) just as he was leaving on a trip, and he was gone before we had resolved our differences. I felt very lonely and empty sitting at our kitchen table, and I heard a plane fly over. I wondered if it was his flight. Then I wrote a poem to try to put words to my feelings, learning as I wrote. Suddenly I saw my temple covenants in a new light. I was willing to give up the petty, unimportant trivialities that stood between us, separating us, so that I could give myself up to the oneness I knew was possible. I let go of me and what I had thought to be my needs for a moment, just a moment—just long enough to care more about him. I have learned to do it better since then but not perfectly. This is the poem I wrote describing the process:

LONELY
*The moment comes
dry and sharp
the quiet, quieter
and empty
empties out my heart
of needless, hollow phrases
said by mind,
said day on day
'til now
when separation
speaks so loudly
in my inward ear
that I must pause and hear
and own the steady, simple cord
of sweet devotion.
Less deep and real things
fail to fly
and die of unearned weight.
I wonder how far
it is to you*

*as a bird flies?
and
do you also separate the strands
of our sweet history
from earth bonds,
sometimes taut, that pull us down?
Is it empty there, too, as you fly?
Do you fill the void
with the constant rush
of love that comes
winging to you?
All of me worth having
flies to you faster than fright,
free, now, from feeble floundering,
seeing clearly carved
in earth and air and sea
our destiny.
Finding the will
to make again another start,
to fly and find you there in air
by heart!*

In other words, I let go of me and embraced us.

We live in a world which cries out to us constantly of our rights and entitlements, as if our only duty is to pamper ourselves. But we have the privilege of learning how much we can give, not how much we can take. At times it may seem impossible to give, like there is nothing left in us to give, yet it is at those very times that we make a fitting sacrifice. It is the gift of self that makes a marriage work. It is the gift of self that makes each of life's relationships work. It cannot be demanded of us. It is a gift we willingly give. God will never compel our righteousness. We must choose it. We make the choice each day. Our covenants help us to make those daily choices because we have promised in advance that we will.

There is such a tender balance of giving and receiving between a husband and a wife. We learn to share in tiny ways; we share our love, our talents, our time, and finally our lives. Hopefully we live with an abundance mentality, knowing no scarcity, able to give of ourselves, all that we have and are. "Freely ye have received, freely give," Christ counseled his apostles as he gave them power to heal and bless (Matthew 10:8). Is it not our goal to also heal and bless freely? And in the giving, never feel deprived, but rather blessed in offering each other our abundance. "There is enough and to spare" (D&C 104:17).

It's possible to manipulate and appear to be sacrificing or to hope someone will find out how giving we are as we rush from one good deed to the next. Visiting teaching is such a fine training ground for learning a better way. It is a private stewardship, limited only by our initiative and creativity. We report one visit per month, and that is a fine beginning. I

love hearing Mary Ellen Edmunds exclaim, "Oh, you only did 100 percent? What does that mean?" We can learn to give more and to give it freely without thought of anything in return. That is the key. As my dear visiting teaching companion reminded me, "We can give anonymously, not letting our right hand know what our left hand is doing." We give in many ways. But sometimes knowing who the giver is, is part of the gift.

An attitude, a way of life, is hinted at here. Let me tell you about a wonderful word in Hebrew which embodies this attitude. It is *hinunee*. It is the common answer of prophets when the Lord calls them to be his messengers. Samuel said it. Isaiah said it. It means "Behold, here am I," with an understood component of "I am at your service. What will you have me do?" It includes the notion of "Thy will be done." Christ said it first, when he offered himself in the heavenly council to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. In answer to the Lord's question, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Isaiah said it powerfully: "Here am I; send me!" (Isaiah 6:8).

When I was fourteen years old I learned a rhyme that I didn't know was quoting Isaiah and Jesus, but the last line sounded so familiar to me and was so compelling:

*Let none hear you idly saying
"There is nothing I can do,"
While the souls of men are dying,
And the Master calls for you.
Gladly take the task he gives you.
Let his work, your pleasure be.
Answer quickly when he calls you,
"Here am I, send me, send me!"
(Anon.)*

To offer ourselves to be sent entails risks and costs, because once we offer and then go, we become responsible. But once we go, we are on his errand, and he promises to bless us. He cares that we succeed, that we return to him. He weeps or rejoices over us just as we do over our own children (Moses 7:28, 37).

I remember how Jesus called the children to him and taught us to be like them.

Last Christmas our forty-year-old Navajo son came home for a wonderful reunion with our whole family. Since his last visit we had added many nieces and nephews, some still toddlers, one already on a mission. As we sat together on Christmas Eve, for the first time in many years with no empty chairs (except Rachel, our missionary granddaughter, who is in Japan), he told us that he had been taught that all the children in his tribe were considered his sons and daughters and were never addressed as nieces or nephews. He went on to say that in his culture, the children were the teachers, that adults were to observe and learn from them. He said he had seen the family picture we'd sent each year and had come home to meet and learn from all his new "sons and daughters." I wondered if his ancestors were among those who knelt at the feet of Jesus, watching him bless the children.

Trying to describe that transcendent Book of Mormon scene, I once wrote a poem called "Behold, Your Little Ones:"

*The children know.
They gather in bright bouquets around Him.
Baby fingers reach to touch Him,
Tiny tendrils waving toward Him.
They listen.
Some not tall enough to see can hear.
Hushed in unexpected silence they stand
Stretching souls to listen.
He stands, as if to go,
But upturned flower faces hold Him fast,
The power of their love a match for His;
Innocent, untrammelled, full of faith,
They hold Him fast.
Flowers He cannot bruise,
Flowers He must not lose
When years trample their innocence.
"Be like a child," the Savior said,
Because
The children know.
(3 Nephi 17:23)*

What do they know that Jesus wants us to emulate?

I love the insight of my dear friend Mary Ellen Edmunds: "Surround yourself with sinless people: associate with children as often as you can."

King Benjamin teaches us to become "as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father" (Mosiah 3:19).

Jesus directs us to observe our children so that we can be like them. If you do not have children of your own, or if they are grown, where do you find them to observe? We are all surrounded by children. Sometimes we don't notice them. Sometimes, even as their mothers, we don't notice them. They are in grocery stores, waiting in line, sitting in grocery carts near us. They stand next to us in elevators, sometimes dwarfed and scared as big bodies crowd around them. They sit not far from us in sacrament meeting, tiny babes, smiling at us over their father's shoulder, even though they don't even know our names. They play on the street in front of our house or on our lawns or in our flowers.

Do we observe and learn from them every chance we get? Do we smile and offer to play a little in the grocery line or quietly take a tiny hand over the bench in sacrament meeting? When we find them muddied in our garden, do we help them pick a bouquet, all the time searching out the qualities Jesus asked us to find? Did you ever notice how fasting

produces childlike feelings, even beyond hunger?

Children are our first tutors in loving. As we love children they will teach us more. Perhaps all we really can teach them is that love endures anything, that it has great staying power, that they can do nothing to keep us from loving them. And they teach us all the rest. In a warm nest of love they are free to teach us all the rest. Do we constantly sing our love aloud to them?

*Sometimes
we just don't sing aloud
the crowded chords
our hearts
compose.
We think that
each one
knows
how dear a part
his is
in our song.*
(Ann N. Madden, a stanza from "The Music of Home")

Let us tell our love to one another in word and action. Sometimes what we do shouts so loudly in their ears that they cannot hear what we say. Love is taught by actions. Gethsemane is the great teaching moment of all time.

My children and grandchildren teach me.

My granddaughter Molly, when she was four, said, "Mommy, your 'just a minute' is a long time!"

My grandson Max, after receiving his first blessing before school in the fall, prayed that night, "Thank you! Thank you so much for letting the Holy Ghost come [when] my daddy gave me a blessing for school."

My grandson Gabe's little four-year-old friend said, "I can hardly wait to grow up!" "But I like you just the way you are," said Gabe's mother. And then the tiny girl continued, "But I want to be a mother!"

My daughter Mindy once knelt and prayed in the Sacred Grove. And when she told her daughter Molly of her answer to that prayer, Molly thought for a moment and then said, "Aren't you glad the devil didn't send that foggy stuff?"

Mindy had the look of personal revelation on her face when, at Molly's age (seven), she exclaimed, "Oh, I see. Every Mr. Nobody is Heavenly Father's friend!"

Our grandson Jed, who was twelve at the time, wrote a letter to his father, Barney,

consoling him after the death of his dear friend who lost a long battle with cancer:

"Dear Dad,

"I know that other than the Holy Ghost and prayer, the scriptures are some of the greatest comforters. Things that I could never think [to] say (that might comfort you) are held within [them]. Things I could never promise, the Lord has promised for me. Read them, and be comforted. Job 19:25–26: "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.

"Love, Jed"

When I look in the mirror and see my mother's face looking back at me and realize I'm sixty-four, seven-year-old Molly's recent conversation with her mother about me brings a smile as I cope with aging: "You know how Nanny used to be really, really pretty? Now that she's really old, I think she's still pretty, you know? She looks like she's just blessed—like she's a faithful person when you just look at her!"

What do we learn from children? To be believing, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, to forget and forgive all in one motion, and much more.

What do we learn from children?

Treasures just waiting to be discovered.

All of us remain the children of a loving Father, born innocent and making our way through a wicked world, tried and tested and healed through faith and love, arriving at last, again, purified—childlike.

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the [children] of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the [children] of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And [everyone] that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:1–3).

We have promised to take upon us the name of Jesus Christ. What a seal on our lives. Sometimes we speak his name hurriedly, absent-mindedly, or simply by rote. Elder L. Edward Brown cautions us: "When we use these sacred words, 'in the name of Jesus Christ,' they are much more than a way to get out of a prayer, out of a testimony, or out of a talk. We are on holy ground. We are using a name most sublime, most holy, most wonderful—the very name of the Son of God . . . this conclusion to prayer may, in many ways, be the most important part of the prayer" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1997).

May I suggest that we use those moments when his name is on our lips to pause, speak it slowly, and remember him as you and I have done this hour, with great reverence

and love. "Jesus, the very thought of thee, with sweetness fills my breast, But sweeter far, thy face to see and in thy presence rest" (*Hymns*[Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985], no. 141).

Gethsemane was Jesus' last "place apart" where he knelt alone and cried out to his Father to be strengthened. One day I was in the garden called Gethsemane all alone. I had a great desire to kneel near where Jesus had knelt to speak my personal thanks for what he had suffered there. Among a flood of thoughts of him I remembered his inviting Peter to come to him across the water and how at another time he promised that when he had been lifted up, he would draw all of us unto him.

I knelt, and I prayed probably one of the most significant prayers I will ever pray in my life. As I left the garden, I wrote down the last words of my prayer and realized it was a poem. This is what I prayed. I offer it to you as my testimony ("Beneath the Violet Windows—Gethsemane"):

*Dear Lord Jesus,
Thou who lovest
The people of the Mosque,
Who would have gathered
The people of the synagogue,
Whose arms continue open
To each saffron-robed monk
And searching nun,
Lord of the children
And the childlike,
Pulled by thy love,
Seized by thy suffering,
Drawn to thee
By everlasting cords,
I come!*

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.