

THE  
*Gateway*  
WE CALL

DEATH

RUSSELL M. NELSON

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"Our purpose in life is to be tested, to develop faith, to make and keep sacred covenants, and, later, to leave," writes Elder Russell M. Nelson, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

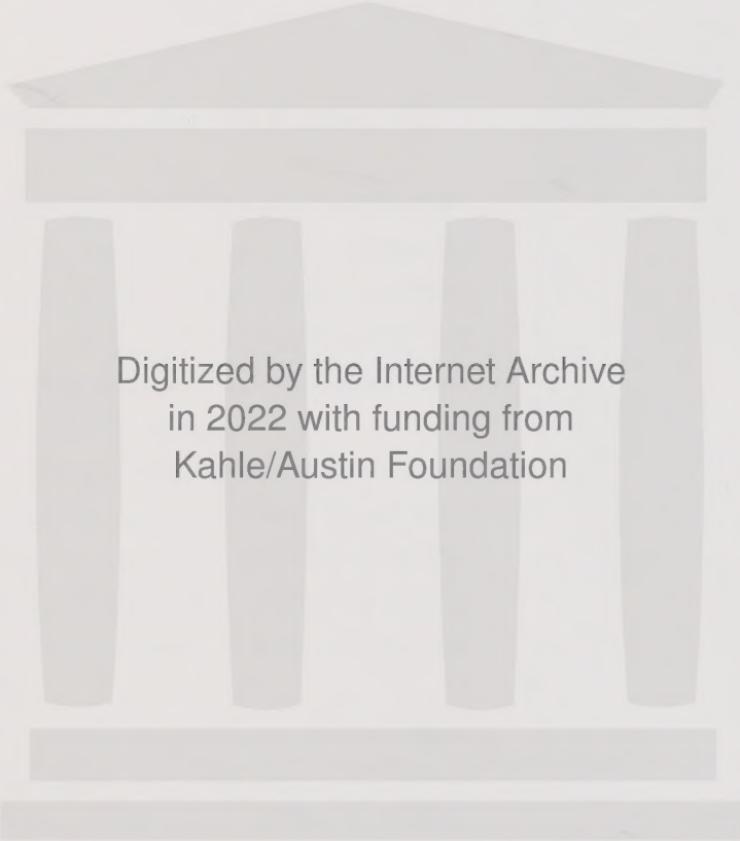
"Our ultimate and highest destiny is to return to our heavenly home. When that time comes, it can be as momentous as the time of birth. Birth is the gateway to mortal life; death is the gateway to immortality and eternal life."

In *The Gateway We Call Death*, Elder Nelson, a surgeon by profession and now a special witness of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, approaches the subject of death from both a medical and a theological point of view to discuss such topics as these:

- The purpose of life and of death
- The purpose of mourning
- When death comes without warning

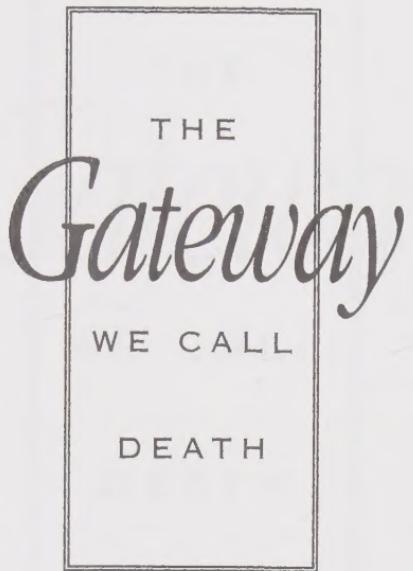
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...the gateways of life



THE  
*Gateway*  
WE CALL  
DEATH

RUSSELL M. NELSON

DESERET BOOK COMPANY  
SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

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## P R E F A C E

FROM 1944, WHEN I ENTERED MEDICAL SCHOOL, until 1984, when I was called to serve as one of the “special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world” (D&C 107:23), most of my professional attention was directed to the acquisition of knowledge and its application toward the relief of illness. My foremost foes were those of ignorance and disease, of distress, of disability, and of death.

My specialty training as a cardiovascular and thoracic surgeon brought me in contact almost daily with seriously ill patients who faced the real prospect of death. Of necessity, I looked upon death as a formidable foe to be fought. In fact, for all conscientious doctors, death’s gateway from life also threatens as a potential gateway to defeat.

Realistically, every patient of every doctor, if followed long enough, will pass away. And when death does occur,

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a sense of sadness naturally seems to prevail, regardless of the age of the deceased.

Having served as a surgeon in many states of the United States of America and in many countries of the world, I have encountered a broad range of reaction among families whenever a loved one is lost. For some, their grief seems to be almost unbearable. For others, their loss seems to be mercifully couched in love, with their heartaches softly cushioned by faith in their Heavenly Father. They seem to be spiritually strengthened by knowledge almost tangible—a knowledge of life continuing after death.

Such was the case with one man I remember well. I spoke with him on the eve of a serious operation that I was to perform. As I again explained the high risk of both the operative procedure and the alternative, he calmly stated, "My life is ready for inspection." Fortunately he survived the operation and lived for many years. Innumerable individuals found happiness by emulating the example of his great faith.

Perhaps even more difficult than personally facing the gateway of death is coping with the grief inflicted by the

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loss of a loved one. Not long ago at the funeral of a friend, I visited with two distinguished brothers—former surgical colleagues of mine—whose lovely companions had both passed away. They said that they were going through the most difficult period of their lives, adjusting to the almost unbearable loss of their partners. These wonderful men then told of their cooking breakfast for each other once a week—sharing that rotation with their sister—as they tried to lessen the loneliness imposed by the departure of their sweethearts.

In my years of service as a servant of the Lord, I have tried to think more as he thinks. I have tried to know more of his teachings and to do more that he would have me do. With an eye single to his glory, I have sharply focused upon his remarkable statement:

“For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.” (Moses 1:39.)

With that focus, my thinking has become more concerned with eternal considerations. An uncommon word describes that viewpoint—*eschatological*.<sup>1</sup> Now I have come to view death as the gateway to immortality and eternal

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life. And as I have come to comprehend more about life in all of its phases, I no longer feel that death is always that foe to be feared. Instead, I view it as a potential friend to be understood. To some extent, I understand what the prophet Jacob meant when he said, "Death hath passed upon all men, to fulfil the merciful plan of the great Creator." (2 Nephi 9:6.) Death is a fellow-traveler with whom each of us will one day walk. Only the time and the place of that rendezvous are not known.

Dealing with grief occasioned by the passing of a loved one is made more tolerable because of the Lord, who provided sublime gifts of comfort and peace. He offered "the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send" in his name. "He shall teach you all things," the Lord said, "and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

Then the Master added: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (John 14:26-27.)

Comfort and peace! What divine and priceless gifts!

Remarkably reassuring for those who encounter grief

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is the promised visitation of the Holy Ghost—the divine Comforter—who will provide hope and perfect love. And when nourished by prayer, that hope and love will endure until the end, when all saints shall dwell with God. (See Moroni 8:26.)

These gifts extend to all who truly believe in him, and are granted because of his infinite love for us. His peace comes as we comprehend his grace and act according to his will. It comes from faith founded upon his infinite atonement. To find that hope, that reassurance, and the ability to carry on, the bereaved person will seek to know the Lord and to serve him. It is his atonement that will make our future bright, regardless of the dark days inevitably encountered on life's journey. The poetess so declared:

*Upon the cross he meekly died  
For all mankind to see  
That death unlocks the passageway  
Into eternity.<sup>2</sup>*

When our mission in mortality is over—when we have passed through the gateway to immortality and eternal

## PREFACE

*W<sup>hat</sup> w<sup>as</sup> plan on*

life—there the gatekeeper will be. “The keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there; and there is none other way save it be by the gate; for he cannot be deceived, for the Lord God is his name.” (2

Nephi 9:41.)

His gospel will help us to prepare for that great day of judgment. His gifts will assuage the grief of the bereaved and bring joy to those who love him. He will help them to fulfill their noblest purposes in life.

My main qualification for presuming to write this book is found in my love of the Lord and for my brothers and sisters throughout the world. I would be their servant and help to bring his comfort, peace, and blessings to all of God’s children everywhere. This book has been written with the hope that its readers may also come to know the proper place of death as a grand gateway in God’s wondrous way for his children. Death is an essential element in his divinely designed plan of salvation.

I hope earnestly that faith, knowledge, hope, and gratitude may spring from the pages of this book.

## P R E F A C E

### NOTES

1. Definition: concerned with ultimate or last things, such as death, judgment, and heaven. The word is derived from two Greek terms, *eschatos*, meaning “last,” and *ology*, meaning “study of.”
2. Vilate Raile, “Upon the Cross of Calvary,” *Hymns*, no. 184.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THIS BOOK IS NOT AN OFFICIAL CHURCH PUBLICATION. I alone am responsible for its contents. I am greatly indebted to the Lord and to his prophets, ancient and modern, who have given so much that we might have access to the sacred scriptures. I have drawn liberally from them, as will be noted from the frequent citations that appear within each chapter. Without the word of the Lord, our understanding of death as the gateway to immortality and eternal life could not be.

To my sweet companion, Dantzel, and to our children, I express my deepest feelings of love and gratitude. Without their constant encouragement and sterling example, I could not begin to become what they and the Lord would have me be. I have watched members of my beloved family face the vicissitudes of life with great courage. I have watched them face the possibility of death

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

with unwavering faith in God and his plan for us. I am honored to be their partner, father, and friend.

Sister Helen R. Hillier has been more than a competent and caring secretary. Her insights and feelings have helped me to serve the many who have wished for a touch of my time.

I am indebted to Ronald A. Millett, Eleanor Knowles, Sheri Dew, and their associates at Deseret Book Company, for their invitation and encouragement to write this book.

## CHAPTER 1

# THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

BEFORE WE CAN COMPREHEND the reason for the gateway and the purpose of death, we must first understand the purpose of life. Imagine how difficult it would be to understand the plot of a complex three-act drama if we missed act one and left before act three. Our perspective would surely be limited, wouldn't it? In the drama we know as mortal life, the curtain goes up at birth. Childhood yields to youth, then adulthood, which accedes to old age. And when the breath of life ceases, the curtain goes down. But that scenario pertains only to act *two* of the great drama.

Act two is intimately related to the first and third acts. Act one began long ago in premortal realms. There we were numbered among "all the seraphic hosts of heaven, before the world was made." (D&C 38:1.) We were spirit sons and daughters of our loving Father in Heaven, eager for an opportunity to come to the earth to receive a body.

## THE GATEWAY WE CALL DEATH

That body was to be created in the image of our divine parentage. It was to serve as the tabernacle for our eternal spirits.

Through the miracle of birth, spirit children of God obtain their physical bodies. But they do not do it as a group. With the relatively rare exception of multiple births, they are born one at a time. Each of us is born as an individual. Only as an individual is each person tested, converted to the Lord, allowed to repent, and baptized.

"There was a space granted unto man in which he might repent; therefore this life became a probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God; a time to prepare for that endless state which has been spoken of by us, which is after the resurrection of the dead." (Alma 12:24.)

And as an individual, each of us will die, be resurrected, be judged, and be allowed to gain admittance to the third act of our own drama.

Thus, while in act two, each human soul consists of two component parts: an eternal spirit and a physical body. Those two components of each human life "are eternal, and spirit and element, inseparably connected." Only when those components are united and later reunited at the time of

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resurrection can an individual “receive a fulness of joy.” (D&C 93:33–34.)

No doubt we understood this concept while participating in act one. There, as premortal spirit children of God, we were excited to enter act two in order to obtain a body and to experience mortality. When the foundations of the earth were laid, “when the morning stars sang together, . . . all the sons of God shouted for joy.” (Job 38:4, 7.) To be granted physical flesh of one’s very own is an exciting and enabling privilege. Without a body, or when spirit and body are separated, one cannot receive a fullness of joy.

Our bodies are truly amazing. They can defend themselves, repair and regulate themselves, even reproduce themselves. Physicians can literally spend an entire professional lifetime studying the intricacies of the structure and function of the human body. Yet the constituents of the body are not unique. Carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, other elements, and chemical compounds by themselves are common and of little intrinsic value. Should we ever get an inflated feeling of our own worth, this scripture should

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make us humble: “For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Genesis 3:19.)

Concepts of death are a challenge to teach, especially to children. Sometimes interpretations as understood and expressed by children are humorous. One leader shared this story with me:

A little boy came home from Primary one day. His mother asked him what he had learned. He replied, “My teacher told me that I used to be dust and I would be dust again. Is that true, Mommy?”

“Yes,” the mother replied. “A scripture tells us so: ‘For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.’”

This little boy was wide-eyed and amazed. The next morning, he was scurrying around getting ready for school, looking for his shoes. As he crawled under the bed, lo and behold, there he saw balls of dust. He ran to his mother in wonder, saying, “Oh, Mommy, somebody’s under my bed, and they’re either coming or going.”

Like all dust of the earth, our physical remains will be recycled. Indeed their ingredients are biodegradable. Our bodies were not created to live in mortality without limit. They were built in such a way that they were subject to

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illness, injury, aging, and death. Sand runs continuously through mortality's hourglass of time. We start to die the moment we are born. Why? The reason is simple. Our Heavenly Father wants us to return to him. He gave us life, and he provided the means by which we could return to him. Viewed from an eternal perspective [we live to die; and we die to live again.]

The creation of the earth fulfilled many divine purposes. It was to serve as a dwelling place for men, women, and children. According to scripture, it was to provide a temporary testing area for God's children: "We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell; and we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them." (Abraham 3:24–25.) Thus, the earth might be labeled as our arena for obedience testing.

The earth was also fashioned to sustain human life. All of this effort was designed to the end that families could become eternally linked, without which the earth would be, in the Lord's words, "utterly wasted."<sup>2</sup>

## ILLNESS, BLESSINGS, AND HEALING

Things can and do go wrong with our physical bodies. They can be injured and are surely subject to illness. Our Maker has instructed us to care for them and not to defile them. We are encouraged to avail ourselves of competent medical counsel and heed it. We are to honor the body as a temple of God, and allow no forbidden thought, sight, sound, or substance to enter its sacred precincts.

We are also privileged to request and receive blessings administered by priesthood authority. This pattern was described in the New Testament: “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up.” (James 5:14–15.)

Administrations to the sick were established during the time of Jesus and practiced thereafter. Authority to perform the ordinance was restored in the latter days, as part of the promised “restitution of all things.” (Acts 3:21.) To his servants, the Lord gave this remarkable promise: “Verily I say, whomsoever you bless I will bless.” (D&C 132:47.) He

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gave this instruction through the Prophet Joseph Smith: "And the elders of the church, two or more, shall be called, and shall pray for and lay their hands upon them in my name; and if they die they shall die unto me, and if they live they shall live unto me." (D&C 42:44.)

That scripture carries assurance beyond compare. It states that priesthood blessings unto the faithful will be recognized by the Lord. Sometimes mortal pleas for healing or prolongation of life are granted, and sometimes they are not. Blessings and prayers should not presume to overlook or attempt to override the will of the Lord. His will is to be honored as supreme. We should follow the example of the Son of God, described poetically by Eliza R. Snow:

*By strict obedience Jesus won  
The prize with glory rife:  
"Thy will, O God, not mine be done,"  
Adorned his mortal life.<sup>3</sup>*

Our Creator divinely designed our pathway. We were not destined to be stranded in mortality forever. Such an arrest of our progression would completely thwart God's "great plan of happiness." (Alma 42:8.)<sup>4</sup> Moreover, we have

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this remarkable reassurance from him: "Those that die in me shall not taste of death, for it shall be sweet unto them."  
(D&C 42:46.)

It was my privilege to be close to both President Spencer W. Kimball and President Ezra Taft Benson during their final days here on the earth. In each instance, the setting was peaceful and serene, faithfully portraying the sweetness described in scripture just cited. Those solemn occasions were also blessed by a spirit of submissiveness to the will of the Lord.

In contrast, even the extreme violence associated with the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum brought a halt to their merciless persecution and rewarded them with sweet reunions in realms above.

*Our purpose in life* is to be tested, to develop faith, to make and keep sacred covenants, and, later, to leave. Our ultimate and highest destiny is to return to our heavenly home. When that time comes, it can be as momentous as the time of birth. Birth is the gateway to mortal life; death is the gateway to immortality and eternal life.

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### NOTES

1. The apostle Paul expressed a similar thought: “as dying, and, behold, we live.” (2 Corinthians 6:9.)
2. Spoken through the Angel Moroni. (See D&C 2:3; 138:48; JS-H 1:39.) In the Old Testament, the Lord conveyed that message through another prophet with different language but similar meaning: “lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.” (Malachi 4:6.)
3. Eliza R. Snow, “How Great the Wisdom and the Love,” *Hymns*, no. 195.
4. The plan is also known as the great plan of redemption, of the Eternal God, of salvation, and of mercy. (See Jacob 6:8; Alma 34:9, 31; 42:5, 8, 31.)

## CHAPTER 2

# THE PURPOSE OF DEATH

DEATH BEGAN WITH THE FALL OF ADAM; it ended with the atonement of Jesus Christ.

Definition of something as obvious as physical death hardly seems necessary. Death separates the spirit and the body. Then “the spirits of all . . . are taken home to that God who gave them life.” (Alma 40:11.)

President Joseph Fielding Smith explained that death “is a state of total and permanent cessation of all the vital functions, and it is followed by the dissolution of the body, which returns to the various elements of which it is composed.”<sup>1</sup>

His reference to the fate of elements that once comprised the body paraphrases one of God’s earliest instructions to man: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou

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taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”  
(Genesis 3:19.)

Each of us may still remember the first startling experience of viewing the mortal remains of a loved one. I remember when my Grandfather Anderson (my mother's father) passed away. Silently I thought to myself, “This is not Grandfather!” And I was correct. It was not Grandfather. The man I loved was not there. I think that was the first time I realized that it was his spirit I knew and loved, not his body. His body only allowed his spirit to function and to love me. Then I understood what an Old Testament author expressed so clearly: “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.” (Ecclesiastes 12:7.) Death can thus be defined as a separation—a separation of the body and the spirit.

Traumatic as such a viewing is to a young person, it serves as an opportunity to teach one of the most important lessons of life, namely that each human soul is comprised of the body and the spirit—two separate and distinct entities. This fact is simply stated in holy writ: “The spirit and the body are the soul of man.” (D&C 88:15.)

With that understanding, we can then comprehend the

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need to exercise spiritual control over the appetites of the body. Spiritual dominion also demands that the divinely created body receive the care it deserves. Self-mastery means spiritual control over the body. Addiction, however, is just the opposite. If one is addicted to a substance, the unrelenting demands of the physical body control the spirit.

"The elements [of the body] are the tabernacle of God; yea, man is the tabernacle of God, even temples; and whatsoever temple is defiled, God shall destroy that temple." (D&C 93:35.) On one of many occasions when Jesus was taunted by his adversaries, he referred to his own body as a temple. (See Mark 14:58; John 2:19.)

Thus far, we have considered only physical death—the death of the body. Prophets have described another kind of death, sometimes termed the second death, or spiritual death. Perhaps we should try to understand the spiritual as well as the physical death.

## SPIRITUAL DEATH

President Joseph Fielding Smith wrote: "Spiritual death is defined as a state of spiritual alienation from God—the

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eternal separation from the Supreme Being; condemnation to everlasting punishment is also called the second death.”<sup>2</sup>

With that definition in mind, it logically follows that one can be spiritually dead, yet very much alive—physically. It is the exact opposite of what I felt when viewing the mortal remains of my grandfather. His physical body was dead; spiritually he was very much alive.

We can all think of people we know who seem to exhibit no spark of spiritual awareness. They appear to be totally concerned with *only* physical and material matters. The apostle Paul warned us of this danger. He said, “If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” (Romans 8:13.)

A Book of Mormon prophet taught a similar lesson: “Whosoever repenteth not is hewn down and cast into the fire; and there cometh upon them again a spiritual death, yea, a second death, for they are cut off again as to things pertaining to righteousness.

“Therefore repent ye, repent ye, lest by knowing these things and not doing them ye shall suffer yourselves to

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come under condemnation, and ye are brought down unto this second death." (Helaman 14:18–19.)

Therefore, spiritual (or the second) death becomes a matter of great importance to us while we sojourn here in mortality. Even the Savior cannot save individuals in their sins. He will redeem them from their sins, but then only through their repentance. Only rarely may we be responsible for physical death, but we are solely responsible for spiritual death.

Whether spiritual death be numbered as the second or the first death is incidental. The real objective is to avoid it. The Master so declared: "Wherefore, I, the Lord God, caused that [Satan] should be cast out from the Garden of Eden, from my presence, because of his transgression, wherein he became spiritually dead, which is the first death, even that same death which is the last death, which is spiritual, which shall be pronounced upon the wicked when I shall say: Depart, ye cursed.

"But, behold, I say unto you that I, the Lord God, gave unto Adam and unto his seed, that they should not die as to the temporal death, until I, the Lord God, should send forth angels to declare unto them repentance and

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redemption, through faith on the name of mine Only Begotten Son.

“And thus did I, the Lord God, appoint unto man the days of his probation—that by his natural death he might be raised in immortality unto eternal life, even as many as would believe; and they that believe not unto eternal damnation; for they cannot be redeemed from their spiritual fall, because they repent not; for they love darkness rather than light, and their deeds are evil, and they receive their wages of whom they list to obey.” (D&C 29:41–45.)

The concept of rescue from spiritual death helps us to understand how we may be “born again” through baptism and reception of the gift of the Holy Ghost. It helps us to see how we can obtain a “new heart” in a spiritual sense. When our hearts change, we think and behave differently. When our hearts truly change, we can walk with confidence and in harmony with God.

Like birth, baptism is also an important initiatory gateway. “For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost.

“And then are ye in this strait and narrow path which

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leads to eternal life; yea, ye have entered in by the gate; ye have done according to the commandments of the Father and the Son; and ye have received the Holy Ghost, which witnesses of the Father and the Son, unto the fulfilling of the promise which he hath made, that if ye entered in by the way ye should receive.

“And now, . . . after ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save.

“Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life. . . . This is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God.” (2 Nephi 31:17–21.)

Scriptures describe some of the detailed changes that may be observed in one who has truly been converted to

## THE PURPOSE OF DEATH

*Born Again  
Live Unto the Holy Spirit*

the Lord and saved from spiritual death. One of the most eloquent is this verse from the Book of Mormon:

“For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh 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.)

In teaching a converted individual determined to repent and seek a righteous life, the Lord gave this encouragement through his prophet Ezekiel: “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.” (Ezekiel 36:26–27.)<sup>3</sup>

The gospel of Jesus Christ provides indemnification against spiritual death. Faith, repentance, baptism, and regular renewal of baptismal covenants by partaking of the sacrament worthily are spiritual life insurance.

## THE GATEWAY WE CALL DEATH

### PHYSICAL DEATH

Returning now to the topic of physical death, let us contemplate its sacred purpose. Ironic as it may seem, death is part of God's great plan of happiness. Scriptures so declare:

"Now behold, it was not expedient that man should be reclaimed from this temporal death, for that would destroy the great plan of happiness." (Alma 42:8.)

"Death hath passed upon all men, to fulfil the merciful plan of the great Creator." (2 Nephi 9:6.)

"Behold . . . it was appointed unto men that they must die; and after death, they must come to judgment, even that same judgment of which we have spoken, which is the end." (Alma 12:27.)

"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die." (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2.)

Those scriptures help us to comprehend that physical death is an essential part of God's plan for us. His divine perception of our lives includes all three acts of the drama—not just act two.

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Even our own logic would cause us to understand the ensuing problems if people only entered and never exited the stage on which act two of life's drama is being played. What would this world be like without death? It would become mighty congested. Perhaps a time of mourning is not the best time for analytical thought, but it is a time to be reminded of the necessity of our passing on.

Estimates suggest that some seventy billion people have lived on planet earth. If they were all still here—if there were no death—we could probably own nothing. Groceries would be scarce and housing would be overcrowded, to say the least. We could hardly make any choices, and accountability would be inopportune. The whole reason for our existence would thus be frustrated.

Not only that, but our Heavenly Father's great plan of happiness would be destroyed. After all, he wants us to return to his presence. His highest hopes are for our immortality and eternal life. — *Like Him*

What loving father or mother does not yearn for the day when a distant daughter or son will return? The longing of the lonesome heart does not ease with the passage of time. It only becomes more intense. Few experiences

## THE GATEWAY WE CALL DEATH

provide the joy that homecoming brings. The embrace of awaiting parents when their arms envelop a beloved son or daughter is truly sublime. If one has experienced that kind of happiness, either as a parent or as a child, then and only then can one understand these scriptures:

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” (Psalm 116:15.)

“Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord . . . that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.” (Revelation 14:13.)

The eager anticipation of reunion is shared by God’s children who yearn for loving parents, as expressed by Eliza R. Snow:

*When I leave this frail existence,  
When I lay this mortal by,  
Father, Mother, may I meet you  
In your royal courts on high?  
Then at length, when I've completed  
All you sent me forth to do,  
With your mutual approbation  
Let me come and dwell with you.<sup>4</sup>*

## THE PURPOSE OF DEATH

(Reunion) reason, and rounding out of divine intent all reassure us that physical death must be. Jonathan Swift appropriately concluded: "It is impossible that anything so natural, so necessary, and so universal as death should ever have been designed as an evil to mankind."<sup>5</sup>

Death is part of life. It is an essential element of God's plan of progression and happiness for his beloved sons and daughters. Death is the gateway to immortality and eternal life.

### NOTES

1. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955), p. 216.
2. *Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 2, p. 217.
3. As one who practiced cardiovascular surgery for many years, I cannot resist the opportunity to note that these verses from Ezekiel alluded to a heart transplantation—even centuries before our present era of sophisticated open-heart surgery. Ezekiel's imagery may have been figurative and used only as a metaphor, but the description of the replacement of a "stony heart" with a "heart of flesh" is equally apropos to the current clinical operation.
4. Eliza R. Snow, "O My Father," *Hymns*, no. 292.
5. Cited by Alma and Clea Burton, *For They Shall Be Comforted* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1964), p. 51.

## CHAPTER 3

# THE PURPOSE OF MOURNING

MY HEART GOES OUT TO EACH INDIVIDUAL who bears the burden of mourning. I share my feelings of empathy and sympathy. The separation imposed by the departure of a loved one evokes pangs of sorrow and shock among those left behind. The hurt is real. Only its intensity varies. Even though we understand the doctrine—even though we dearly love God and his eternal plan—mourning remains. It is not only normal; it is a healthy reaction. Mourning is one of the purest expressions of deep love. It is a perfectly natural response—in complete accord with divine commandment: “Thou shalt live together in love, insomuch that thou shalt weep for the loss of them that die.” (D&C 42:45.)

Moreover, we can’t fully appreciate joyful reunions later

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without tearful separations now. The only way to take sorrow out of death is to take love out of life.

The grief that we feel is not unknown to the Lord. It was he who said, "Blessed are all they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." (3 Nephi 12:4; see also Matthew 5:4.)

Where can we turn for peace? We can come unto the Lord Jesus Christ. With consummate love, he said: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (John 14:27.) His peace differs from that offered by any other. His is the peace provided by our knowledge of the resurrection. His gift of life after death applies to all mankind.

His gift includes the opportunity of dwelling again with him and with his Father. He said, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:1-2.)

Grief is assuaged as his peace enters our lives. It brings

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true understanding and calm assurance that all is well. "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7.) Peace comes when we go directly to our best friend—the Prince of Peace. We find solace when we lose ourselves in service to him and to our neighbors.

Though we mourn today, tomorrow we will wish to bring comfort to others. Instead of being ministered unto, we will become the ministers of soothing "balm" in the "Gileads" of our own neighborhoods. (See Jeremiah 8:22.) Our experience with sorrow will make us more compassionate and capable in our desire to ease the suffering of another.

Teaching of eternal perspective will be an essential part of our aid. The Prophet Joseph Smith conveyed that point of view when he spoke at the funeral of a loved one. He offered this admonition: "When we lose a near and dear friend, upon whom we have set our hearts, it should be a caution unto us. . . . Our affections should be placed upon God and His work, more intensely than upon our fellow beings."<sup>1</sup>

Divine purpose is fulfilled in mourning and in

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receiving ministrations of those who proffer assistance. Moreover, any who provide comfort to those in mourning will receive their own reward. Recognition of this desire is one of the prerequisites for baptism and admission into the Church: "Now, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light;

"Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life—

"Now I say unto you, if this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you?" (Mosiah 18:8–10.)

In that spirit, the converted Christian commits his or her life to help others and to lighten the load of those who mourn.

## BOUNDS AND CONDITIONS OF MOURNING

The divine sanction of mourning has necessary limits, however. Just as overdoses of needed medication can be toxic, so limitless grief can go out of bounds. We understand the need for boundaries in sports activities such as football, basketball, tennis, or golf. Boundary lines are equally important in the game of life and in regulating grief when mourning for the loss of a loved one. “Unto every law there are certain bounds also and conditions.” (D&C 88:38.) The law that promises blessings to those who mourn is no exception. Its boundary lines may not be as clearly marked as they are on the playing field. But they are discernible. We should recognize them and protect ourselves against those hazards.

Out-of-bounds warning signs may first be detected if one should presume to counsel the Lord. That, in turn, could lead to a vicious cycle of forgetting him, then contending with or even cursing against him. These cautions are so important that they need to be carefully considered by those who mourn.

Presuming to counsel God is a common pitfall. We

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may have heard questions asked such as, "Why did God do this to me?" Or "why did this innocent child, this promising youth, this young mother with children to raise, or this young man at the height of his career, have to be taken now?" Or a comparative question may be considered, even with a tone of anger: "Why does such a promising and productive person have to die when old Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ is ready to go and can't?" Or "Why does such a virtuous person die when 'the wicked live, become old, yea, [and] are mighty in power?'" (Job 21:7.)

Scriptures have also recorded and warned against such presumption to counsel: "Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker?" (Job 4:17.) "Shall any teach God knowledge?" (Job 21:22.)

Job suffered much misery, yet he only pleaded that his heavy "grief were thoroughly weighed, and [his] calamity laid in the balances together." (Job 6:2.) To me, that seems to be a reasonable request.

Scripture speaks of one who would mistakenly "curse God" (Job 2:9) because of afflictions of the flesh. Some of us have seen grieving souls who seem to have forgotten that very God who gave life to the person for whom they

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mourn. How ungrateful! Shall we receive only what we wish from him—and that only when we are receptive? (See Job 2:10.)

We cannot presume to instruct those who mourn, but we can try to understand what they feel. It is difficult for them to express all they feel. Indeed, they often close off their deepest emotions. I doubt if Job wrote *everything* he felt. I am grateful for his expression of steadfast faith:

“I would seek unto God, . . . [who] doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number: Who giveth rain upon the earth, and sendeth waters upon the fields: to set up on high those that be low; that those which mourn may be exalted to safety.” (Job 5:8–11.)

Gratefully we need to remember that God grants life and everything that sustains life. Each marvelous moment is both a mystery and a miracle. While mourning, may we not take life’s wonder for granted. King Benjamin taught: “I say unto you, my brethren, that if you should render all the thanks and praise which your whole soul has power to possess, to that God who has created you, and has kept and preserved you, . . . I say unto you that if ye should serve him who has created you from the beginning, and is

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preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move and do according to your own will, and even supporting you from one moment to another—I say, if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants.” (Mosiah 2:20–21.)

Those in distress may find it hard to understand the need for further faith. Even early disciples of the Lord were subject to that challenge. After the Redeemer was resurrected, “he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.” (Mark 16:14.)

Great blessings are promised to those who overcome the sin of unbelief: “Come unto me, O ye Gentiles, and I will show unto you the greater things, the knowledge which is hid up because of unbelief.

“Come unto me, O ye house of Israel, and it shall be made manifest unto you how great things the Father hath laid up for you, from the foundation of the world; and it hath not come unto you, because of unbelief.

“Behold, when ye shall rend that veil of unbelief . . . then shall the great and marvelous things which have been

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hid up from the foundation of the world from you—yea, when ye shall call upon the Father in my name, with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, then shall ye know that the Father hath remembered the covenant which he made unto your fathers, O house of Israel." (Ether 4:13–15.)

Worse than unbelief is contention with the Lord. Worse than to contend with God is to curse him, because that has long been a worrisome sign of spiritual death.

On the other hand keeping grief within bounds allows the spiritually attuned to weep for the loss of their loved one. Moreover, they shall receive a blessing from the Lord if they have a thankful heart in all things. They acknowledge the goodness of their Creator and the divinity of his plan. They express gratitude for life and all that sustains life. Especially do they thank God for granting life to the beloved one for whom they mourn.

The Psalmist said, "I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving." (Psalm 69:30.) We also honor him by our worship and obedience, by our service and gratitude.

Those who mourn will be consoled as they reaffirm their trust in God. We should not seek "to counsel the

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Lord, but to take counsel from his hand. For behold, [we] know that he counseleth in wisdom, and in justice, and in great mercy, over all his works." (Jacob 4:10.) Neither does the faithful person contend with "an appointed time to man upon earth" (Job 7:1), but he or she begins to understand that triumphs, tribulations, and death are part of life. Just as Abraham was commanded to offer up his only son, each of us may be required to part with a beloved son, daughter, or companion. That is part of the divine process of chastening, refining, and sanctification. (See D&C 101:4-5.) In that spirit of resolute commitment to God, a contrite Job so stated: "When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." (Job 23:10.)

Faith and trust in God are manifested by service to him and to neighbors near and far. Samuel said, "Fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you." (1 Samuel 12:24.)

That faith is constantly reinforced by recollection of divine love for all mankind. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn

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the world; but that the world through him might be saved.” (John 3:16–17.) That was not an easy thing for Heavenly Father to do. Neither was it easy for his Beloved Son. But they did it! “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13.) Jesus did this for us—voluntarily!

 Grieving is the work of enlarging our understanding. It can be made more tolerable by following the pattern of divine example. When we feel sorry for ourselves, we may recall these words of the Lord to the Prophet Joseph Smith: “The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he? Therefore, hold on thy way, and the priesthood shall remain with thee; for their bounds are set, they cannot pass. Thy days are known, and thy years shall not be numbered less; therefore, fear not what man can do, for God shall be with you forever and ever.” (D&C 122:8–9.)

The Prophet endured much grief. When he prayed for relief, he received this divine instruction: “All these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.” (D&C 122:7.) Just as there is purpose in pain, so the ability to endure will come with an understanding of God's eternal purposes.

## THE PURPOSE OF MOURNING

(Gateways are needed. They are part of the Lord's plan of salvation and redemption. Our duty is to prepare worthily for that time of transition through the gateway of death, just as we pass through the gateway of birth and of being born again through baptism. "Wherefore, enter ye in at the gate, as I have commanded, and seek not to counsel your God." (D&C 22:4.)

Retained within proper bounds, mourning is neither a sign of weakness nor is it to be avoided. It, too, is an important part of God's great plan of happiness. Not only that, it provides opportunity for others to give comfort. That will bless their lives as well. Mourning is the lubricant of love at the gateway.

### NOTE

1. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City, 1938), p. 216.

CHAPTER 4

## WHEN DEATH COMES WITHOUT WARNING

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, one of our General Authorities and his eternal companion had a wonderful son taken in his youthful prime because of an automobile accident. It happened so suddenly. In a brief moment, he was literally transferred through the gateway from this world to the next. There had been no preexisting illness and no time to prepare for such shocking news.

Similar experiences have been endured by families of loved ones lost in war or through other violent actions or accidents that occurred in the “twinkling of an eye.” (D&C 101:31.) Perhaps these are the most difficult of all burdens borne, because death comes so unexpectedly. No challenge in life may be as intense as this.

While those so bereft of a loved one are unable to change facts as they really are, important lessons can be

## WHEN DEATH COMES WITHOUT WARNING

learned. Hopefully, we all do not need to endure such experiences personally to profit by those same lessons:

1. • The very laws that could not allow such a broken body to survive here are the same eternal laws the Lord will employ at the time of the resurrection, when that body "shall be restored to [its] proper and perfect frame." (Alma 40:23.) We can be greatly reassured knowing that the Lord who created us in the first place surely has power to do it again.
2. • Our routine assumption that there will always be a tomorrow is not always validated. Wise is the person who lives each day as if it were the last day on earth. ?
3. • Parents, partners, and families bid farewell in the morning with no guarantee that their next reunion will be according to their planned location and timetable. Should tragedy alter those plans, how nice it would be if words of courtesy and love were the last to have been exchanged.
4. • Delay of payment of debts may not have tomorrow's time to erase that bondage or blemish on one's reputation. (See D&C 19:35.) Sweet is the peace brought by freedom from debt.
5. • Procrastination of repentance carries great risk. The

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number of tomorrows is limited. The conquest of physical addiction, for example, must be done while it is still possible to exert spiritual supremacy over temptations of the flesh.) (See Romans 8:6; 2 Nephi 9:39.)

I remember vividly an experience I had as a passenger in a small two-propeller airplane. One of the engines suddenly burst open and caught on fire. The propeller of the flaming engine was starkly stilled. As we plummeted in a steep spiral dive toward the earth, I expected to die. Some of the passengers screamed in hysterical panic. Miraculously, the precipitous dive extinguished the flames. Then, by starting up the other engine, the pilot was able to stabilize the plane and bring us down safely.

Throughout that ordeal, though I felt that sudden death was coming, my paramount feeling was that I was not afraid to die. I remember a sense of returning home to meet ancestors for whom I had done temple work. I remember my deep sense of gratitude that my sweetheart and I had been sealed eternally to each other and to our children born and reared in the covenant. I realized that our marriage in the temple was our most important accomplishment. Honors bestowed upon me by men could

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not begin to approach the inner peace provided by sealings performed in the House of the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

Temple ordinances made and covenants obeyed bequeath peace of mind regardless of when and where death might subsequently come to a person.

The disaster of sudden death or the ever-present possibility of catastrophe should impress upon our minds the importance of living each day to the very best of our ability. Should such tragedy strike, our soothing consolation can come from the Lord, whose atonement makes the resurrection a reality regardless of how or where one passes through the gateway to immortality and eternal life.

### NOTE

1. This experience was also quoted in my address at the April 5, 1992, afternoon session of general conference. See "Doors of Death," *Ensign*, May 1992, pp. 72-74.

## CHAPTER 5

# WHEN CHILDREN DIE

YEARS AGO WHEN I WAS A YOUNG RESIDENT at a large university hospital, I became acquainted with a very special child. She was only three years old, as I recall—bright, beautiful, and bubbling with personality. Frequently while I was making rounds I would visit her, not because she was my patient, but because she was my dear little friend. I shall identify her as Julie, though that was not her real name.

Julie was afflicted with leukemia of the most severe variety. In contrast with present progress in the treatment of that dreaded disease, relatively little could be done for her in those days. Julie's dutiful and devoted parents became my good friends too. They were members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and that made us feel like family. Julie's mother was more active in the Church than was her father, a wonderful man who simply had not as yet made his way to full participation.

Little Julie's cheerful outlook and complete faith in the Lord influenced all of us for good. Ironically, the deeper her decline, the higher her spirituality seemed to rise.

Julie's death occurred just prior to her fourth birthday. Though we sorrowed, we realized that we were all more devoted Latter-day Saints because of her. Her father had been deeply moved and changed by her great faith. Her passing brought him face to face with life, death, and the plan of salvation. No longer could he postpone his decision to declare his gratitude and allegiance to God, who had granted life to little Julie. Instead of becoming embittered, he became a powerful disciple of the Lord and a compassionate and capable leader in the Church. Subsequently, he served as a ~~stake president~~, a ~~regional representative~~, and the ~~president of a temple~~. There he sealed many families for time and for all eternity. Julie's mother continued to be a stalwart, and all who knew her judged her to be a model matron in the temple where her husband presided. Today, little Julie's parents are numbered among Sister Nelson's and my very choice friends.

I relate this incident because I learned a tremendous lesson from this exceptional child. The illness that claimed

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*her life influenced countless individuals for good,*

her life influenced innumerable individuals for good, both directly and indirectly. For her parents, the gateway did not become a passage of gloom. It became the gateway of gladness, opening opportunities to bind the hearts of countless children to their fathers, and fathers to their children.

I also learned that every now and then, the Lord takes these special spirits back home to him early, as if to spare them some of the weighty trials that mortality would have brought. Repeatedly I have seen that happen. Spiritually mature and sensitive children are called by their Creator prematurely (according to human criteria) to pass through the gateway to immortality and eternal life.

The Prophet Joseph Smith expressed himself on this subject. He said, "The Lord takes many away even in infancy, that they may escape the envy of man, and the sorrows and evils of this present world; they were too pure, too lovely, to live on earth; therefore if rightly considered, instead of mourning we have reason to rejoice as they are delivered from evil, and we shall soon have them again."

He further explained: "All children are redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, and the moment that children leave this world, they are taken to the bosom of Abraham.

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The only difference between the old and young dying is, one lives longer in heaven and eternal light and glory than the other, and is freed a little sooner from this miserable wicked world.”<sup>1</sup>

From Julie and other extraordinary children like her, I learned that there is no premature death for a righteous individual. Death can be premature only if a person is not prepared to meet his or her Maker. As Paul declared: “The sting of death is sin.” (1 Corinthians 15:56.)

Sorrowing parents need not censure themselves because they cannot save the lives of all of their children. Even parental error is not transmitted to their children’s accountability: “The sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children, for they are whole from the foundation of the world.” (Moses 6:54.)

Lamenting parents may safely place their trust in the hands of God, who lent them each precious little life in the first place. Though parental grief is real, normal, and divinely encouraged (see D&C 42:45), it can be eased to a tolerable degree by sincere gratitude—and understanding. Those little ones are children of our Heavenly Father, too.

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The Psalmist said, "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward." (Psalm 127:3.)

Infants and little children are accorded unique consideration in the judgment scale of the Lord. He has revealed to his prophets these enlightening scriptures:

"All children are alike unto me; wherefore, I love little children with a perfect love; and they are all alike and partakers of salvation." (Moroni 8:7.)

"All children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven." (D&C 137:10.)

"Little children are redeemed from the foundation of the world through mine Only Begotten; wherefore, they cannot sin, for power is not given unto Satan to tempt little children, until they begin to become accountable before me; for it is given unto them even as I will, according to mine own pleasure, that great things may be required at the hand of their fathers." (D&C 29:46–48.)

"Little children also have eternal life," added Abinadi. (Mosiah 15:25.)

Not only do these remarkable scriptures provide truth and soothing reassurance, but they also influence

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decisions in the care of children who are critically ill. Occasionally the question is posed about possible baptism of a child who may not survive until accountability at age eight. An understanding of the doctrine provides a sure answer to that question. Baptism is not needed. A sample of relevant scriptures confirms that statement:

"Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God." (D&C 93:38.)

"All little children are alive in Christ, and also all they that are without the law. For the power of redemption cometh on all them that have no law; wherefore, he that is not condemned, or he that is under no condemnation, cannot repent; and unto such baptism availeth nothing." (Moroni 8:22.)

Elder Bruce R. McConkie paraphrased that scripture in his own positive manner: "Little children shall be saved. They are alive in Christ and shall have eternal life. For them the family unit will continue, and the fulness of exaltation is theirs. No blessing shall be withheld. They shall rise in

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immortal glory, grow to full maturity, and live forever in the highest heaven of the celestial kingdom.”<sup>2</sup>

President Joseph F. Smith penned one of the most exalting and expansive statements on the condition of children who depart from mortality’s veil of tears at an early age. He wrote: “They will inherit their glory and their exaltation, and they will not be deprived of the blessings that belong to them; for, in the economy of heaven, and in the wisdom of the Father, who doeth all things well, those who are cut down as little children are without any responsibility for their taking off, they, themselves, not having the intelligence and wisdom to take care of themselves and to understand the laws of life; and, in the wisdom and mercy and economy of God our Heavenly Father, all that could have been obtained and enjoyed by them if they had been permitted to live in the flesh will be provided for them hereafter. They will lose nothing by being taken away from us in this way. . . .

“Joseph Smith, the prophet, was the promulgator under God of these principles. He was in touch with the heavens. God revealed himself unto him, and made known unto him the principles that lie before us, and which are

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comprised in the everlasting gospel. Joseph Smith declared that the mother who laid down her little child, being deprived of the privilege, the joy, and the satisfaction of bringing it up to manhood or womanhood in this world, would, after the resurrection, have all the joy, satisfaction and pleasure, and even more than it would have been possible to have had in mortality, in seeing her child grow to the full measure of the stature of its spirit. . . .

“ . . . When the mother is deprived of the pleasure and joy of rearing her babe to manhood or to womanhood in this life, through the hand of death, that privilege will be renewed to her hereafter, and she will enjoy it to a fuller fruition than it would be possible for her to do here. When she does it there, it will be with the certain knowledge that the results will be without failure; whereas here, the results are unknown until after we have passed the test.”<sup>3</sup>

Sweet and innocent children surely return to their loving Father in Heaven. Earthly parents understandably wonder what those children will be like in their subsequent reunions. While I cannot answer such questions fully, precious insights can be gained from another statement of President Joseph F. Smith: “The spirits of our chil-

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dren are immortal before they come to us, and their spirits, after bodily death, are like they were before they came. They are as they would have appeared if they had lived in the flesh, to grow to maturity, or to develop their physical bodies to the full stature of their spirits. If you see one of your children that has passed away, it may appear to you in the form in which you would recognize it, the form of childhood; but if it came to you as a messenger bearing some important truth, it would perhaps come as the spirit of Bishop Edward Hunter's son (who died when a little child) came to him, in the stature of full-grown manhood, and revealed himself to his father, and said, 'I am your son.'"<sup>4</sup>

Parents who have surrendered the sweetest and smallest flowers from the family's garden need to remember our loving Heavenly Father. He has promised a special reward to those who now suffer in silence, who spend long days and longer nights through their trying times of bereavement. Our Creator has promised *glory*. He said, "For after much tribulation come the blessings. Wherefore the day cometh that ye shall be crowned with much glory; the hour is not yet, but is nigh at hand." (D&C 58:4.)

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That promised glory includes the blessing of reunion with each little child who has left the family circle early to help surviving members of the family to draw nearer to God. Those little children still live and are a heritage of the Lord.

### NOTES

1. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, pp. 196–97.
2. Bruce R. McConkie, “The Salvation of Little Children,” *Ensign*, April 1977, p. 3.
3. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine* (Salt Lake City, 1919), pp. 453–54.
4. *Gospel Doctrine*, p. 455.

## CHAPTER 6

# WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE DIE

IF WE PAUSE TO REFLECT on our youthful days when we were getting our education, we may vividly recall a classmate or two who lost their lives. High school and college yearbooks usually contain thoughtful notations and photographs commemorating such circumstances. One of my closest friends—one of the most intelligent and worthy men that I have known—was a victim of enemy fire in World War II. To this day, I often think of him.

Throughout mankind's history on the earth, the disastrous deeds of war have claimed heroic youth among many casualties. Their call to arms in time of war brings them face to face with the real possibility of premature parting from loved ones. In some instances, that possibility has even become a premonition. Such was the situation with Alan Seeger. In sensing the imminence of his demise, he

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penned one of the greatest poems written during World War I, entitled "I Have a Rendezvous with Death":

*I have a rendezvous with Death  
At some disputed barricade*

*When Spring comes round with rustling shade  
And apple blossoms fill the air.*

*I have a rendezvous with Death  
When Spring brings back blue days and fair.*

*It may be he shall take my hand  
And lead me into his dark land  
And close my eyes and quench my breath;  
It may be I shall pass him still.*

*I have a rendezvous with Death  
On some scarred slope of battered hill,  
When Spring comes round again this year  
And the first meadow flowers appear.*

*God knows 'twere better to be deep  
Pillowed in silk and scented down,  
Where love throbs out in blissful sleep,  
Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,*

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*Where hushed awakenings are dear . . .  
But I've a rendezvous with Death  
At midnight in some flaming town,  
When Spring trips north again this year,  
And I to my pledged word am true,  
I shall not fail that rendezvous.<sup>1</sup>*

The poet and patriot, Alan Seeger, lost his life in 1916—on the Fourth of July.

Regardless of cause, in wartime or peace, when such vigorous and vibrant young men or women have been taken by trauma unforeseen and swift—often by unnatural means—the grief produced among survivors is sudden and unrelenting.

While speaking at the funeral of such a young man, the Prophet Joseph Smith also reflected upon the death of his oldest brother, Alvin, and his youngest brother, Don Carlos. He said: “It has been hard for me to . . . see these young men upon whom we have leaned for support and comfort taken from us in the midst of their youth. Yes, it has been hard to be reconciled to these things . . . yet I

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know we ought to be still and know it is of God, and be reconciled to His will; all is right.”<sup>2</sup>

But to the parents of a beloved young person who has passed through the gateway, death could loom as a span of sadness or it could become the gateway to other opportunity unforeseen. Parents meet that challenge in various ways. I know well a mother and father whose son was taken in a tragic automobile accident on the eve of his embarking on a full-time mission. The parents of nine children, they were of modest means and their resources were also being taxed by treatments for the mother, who was battling cancer. What did they do? They donated their son’s entire missionary fund—more than five thousand dollars—to the general missionary fund of the Church. When I discussed this generous decision with them, they replied, “Our son had earned and saved this money for his mission. If he cannot go, his money can. We are donating it so that others can serve. His money will still go on a mission.”

Now, more than a decade later, I observe that both parents are doing well. In addition to other important callings in the Church, the father has served a distinguished term as a stake president. The mother is living without evidence

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good for something

of recurrent cancer and is leading a normal, productive life. The eight surviving children are also blessed with material and spiritual sufficiency. All members of that family have been blessed by the great faith that prompted such an effective example of managing grief.

Turning adversity into opportunity captured the thoughts of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who wrote: "The death of a dear friend . . . which seemed nothing but privation, somewhat later assumes the aspect of a guide or genius; for it commonly operates revolutions in our way of life, terminates an epoch of infancy or of youth which was waiting to be closed, breaks up a wonted occupation, or a household, or style of living, and allows the formation of new ones more friendly to the growth of character. . . . And the man or woman who would have remained a sunny garden flower, with no room for its roots and too much sunshine for its head, by the falling of the walls and the neglect of the gardener, is made the banyan of the forest yielding shade and fruit to wide neighborhoods of men."<sup>3</sup>

The realities of agency and occasional choice to do wrong need to be reckoned with in the passing of some of our youth. Even though their bodies may be mature, their

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heads are strong and sometimes puerile. Their behavior may be furtive or unfortunate. When those deeds result in disobedience or demise, their parents and loved ones need special consoling.

That was the subject of Elder Orson F. Whitney's conference address in April 1929. He said, "The prophet Joseph Smith declared—and he never taught more comforting doctrine—that the eternal sealings of faithful parents and the divine promises made to them for valiant service in the Cause of Truth, would save not only themselves but likewise their posterity. Though some of the sheep may wander, the eye of the Shepherd is upon them and sooner or later they will feel the tentacles of Divine Providence reaching out after them, and drawing them back to the fold. Either in this life or in the life to come, they will return. They will have to pay their debt to justice; they will suffer for their sins; and may tread a thorny path, but if it leads them at last, like the penitent prodigal, to a loving and forgiving Father's heart and home, the painful experience will not have been in vain. Pray for your careless and disobedient children, hold on to them with your faith. Hope on, trust on, till you see the salvation of God.

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“Who are these straying sheep—these wayward sons and daughters? They are children of the Covenant, heirs to the promise, and have received, if baptized, the Gift of the Holy Ghost, which makes manifest the things of God.”<sup>4</sup>

Our young sons and daughters—precious youth of the noble birthright—if called through the gateway by whatever cause, will yet participate in the glorious gifts provided by the atonement of Jesus Christ.

### NOTES

1. From *Poems by Alan Seeger*. Copyright 1916, by Charles Scribner's Sons. Cited in *One Hundred and One Famous Poems*, comp. Roy J. Cook (Chicago: Contemporary Books, Inc.), p. 10.
2. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, pp. 215–16.
3. “Compensation,” *Emerson's Essays*, 3, quoted in Orson F. Whitney, *Saturday Night Thoughts* (Salt Lake City, 1927), p. 269. The word *banyan* originally appeared as *banion* and has been changed to conform with the modern-day spelling.
4. Orson F. Whitney, Conference Report, April 1929, pp. 110–11.

## CHAPTER 7

# WHEN ADULTS DIE

THE VAST MAJORITY OF US will experience the joys and the aches that accompany a full span of life. Our passing will come when we are mature or even aged adults. We will also (if we haven't done so already) part company with parents after one or both of them have reached the so-called golden age.

That circumstance pertained with me. Mother was in her ninety-first year at the time of her demise. Daddy was nearly ninety-four. Yet our family was typical in our reluctance to say good-bye. (When *would* we be willing to part with those we love?) Even when elderly or infirm persons need merciful relief, their loved ones are rarely ready to let go.

The only length of life that seems to satisfy the longings of the human heart is life everlasting.

As our father cared for our mother during her termi-

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nal illness, he taught important lessons to the family. We learned from their example that true love is not a matter of moonlight and roses. True love compassionately responds to the question, "Who will care for me when I am old?" He tenderly ministered to her needs and gave continuing consideration to her as a full partner, even to her very last day on earth. After her passing, he groomed her grave site as faithfully as he did his own home. Not only that, he also fully occupied his time doing nice things for his family, friends, and neighbors.

One day Daddy submitted to a reporter's interview. He was asked if, as a widower, he was lonesome for his departed wife. To that rather indelicate question, he responded, "Yes, I am lonesome, but never lonely! I am too busy doing things with my children and grandchildren to be lonely."

Always generous to family and friends, our parents regarded their finest gift to their children to be the solemnization of their marriage in the holy temple. That truly was a great day for them and for us. What a blessing it is to bind "the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart

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of the children to their fathers" for all eternity! (Malachi 4:6.) That can be done only in a House of the Lord.

To the surviving partner after a long marriage, the gateway of death could lead to desolation and isolation. Many are still lonely. But those gates could also be opened to opportunities of consecration and jubilation. Hope and help come from filling a divine prescription for happiness: "Said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." (Matthew 16:24-25.)

This practice really works. When one stops focusing on personal problems and seeks to serve others, relief comes in a wondrous way. Perhaps an example will serve to illustrate. Not long ago I received a letter from devoted sister in the Church. Her husband had passed away some seventeen years previously. This dear friend expressed herself so sincerely that I would like to quote from her letter:

"As I look back [upon the death of my husband] in retrospect," she wrote, "I can see more clearly now the hand of the Lord guiding me along, giving me opportunities to

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grow and develop in ways that I probably never would have done otherwise. This is a testimony to me. I know that the Lord loves me.

"I have learned so many valuable lessons. I have learned to truly depend upon the Lord and to know that he is always there. I know that he is aware of everything I do, and above all, is right there to help me in those times when I need him the most. He has proven this to me over and over again when I have learned to 'let go' and just truly trust.

"I have so much to be thankful for. I try every day to remember my blessings, and as I do this I am left with a feeling of humbleness and a renewed desire to just try to live worthy of the blessings I have already received."

Then, after detailing her activities with her family and the Church, she concluded: "You can see that my life is rich and full—truly my 'cup runneth over.'"

What a marvelous message from a wonderful woman!

In addition to the joy of accomplishment and opportunities for happy hours with the family, especially the grandchildren, the adult's aging process brings counter-balancing physical and spiritual trials. Increased longevity

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means increased opportunity for something to go wrong. The train of advancing age carries the baggage of continuing challenges. A person previously healthy is now required to submit to the pain of chronic disease, or the discomforts occasioned by treatment, such as operative surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, or daily ingestion or injections of essential medication.

Orson F. Whitney wrote of the instructional value of affliction: "No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. It ministers to our education, to the development of such qualities as patience, faith, fortitude and humility. All that we suffer and all that we endure, especially when we endure it patiently builds up our characters, purifies our hearts, expands our souls, and makes us more tender and charitable, more worthy to be called the children of God . . . and it is through sorrow and suffering, toil and tribulation, that we gain the education that we come here to acquire and which will make us more like our Father and Mother in heaven."<sup>1</sup>

Many people in the twilight of life are compelled to tolerate long and difficult days. They have firsthand knowledge of the oft-repeated divine injunction to "endure to the

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end." One of those scriptures may serve to sample the many. The Savior said, "Be patient in afflictions, for thou shalt have many; but endure them, for, lo, I am with thee, even unto the end of thy days." (D&C 24:8.) The promise of such celestial companionship is most reassuring.

Just as the Master submitted to baptism to fulfill all righteousness, so did he allow himself to endure agonizing trials, even to the end of his mortal ministry. He repeatedly asked that we pattern our lives after his. So we must endure our trials just as he did. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." (Hebrews 5:8.)

At a sacrament meeting I attended recently, I met a not-so-young sister in a wheelchair. She lacked the normal musculoskeletal coordination of her upper extremities. Indeed, her arms seemed totally useless. I observed, for example, that her husband placed the emblems of the sacrament in her mouth. I asked their bishop about her. He replied that she had become a talented writer and painter, accomplishing all of that with her feet. She had also learned to crochet—with her toes. How I admire persons who overcome such difficulty by the development of

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talents unknown to us without such a so-called handicap! I feel the same way about the sightless who learn to read braille, those without hearing who communicate by sign language, and so on.

As vital instruments in the hands of the Lord, prophets are also required to overcome hardships in order to accomplish his holy purposes. History is replete with examples of both the miraculous and the unlikely in the unfolding drama of his work. Many prophets have been required to pass through the crucible of adversity. In this dispensation, the Prophet Joseph Smith was so tormented, tested, and tutored. While he was subjected to the indignity of illegal incarceration, his prayers for relief brought these words from the Lord: "Thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; and then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high." (D&C 121:7-8.)

In an obscure jail, this seemingly forgotten prisoner was given this divine promise: "The ends of the earth shall inquire after thy name." (D&C 122:1.)

The pattern of overcoming insurmountable odds can be identified among Joseph Smith's successors. Several

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examples might be cited. Upon whom did God call to reveal and announce the privilege of the priesthood for all worthy males? President Spencer W. Kimball—a prophet who learned to speak with only half a vocal cord!

Upon whom did God call to send missionaries with the Book of Mormon and establish the Church in countries under the yoke of communism in Middle and Eastern Europe? President Ezra Taft Benson—an outspoken foe of communism! And in the process, communism crumbled in virtually all of those countries during his period of presidency.

Upon whom did God call to stand again and speak as the fourteenth President of the Church? President Howard W. Hunter—one who had earlier sustained mechanical injury to his spinal cord resulting in total paralysis of his lower limbs! For more than two and one-half years, he could not move his lower extremities. Advanced medical tests gave no hope that he would regain ability either to stand or to walk. Miraculously—virtually without precedent—considerable function did

No cross - no crown  
No pain - No gain

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return, enabling him to walk with assistance and stand as a prophet of God.

So it is with prophets past, present, and future. They too "must needs be chastened and tried, even as Abraham." (D&C 101:4.)

When hardship heaps its heavy load upon any of us, much good may yet be gleaned. Shakespeare so wrote:

*Sweet are the uses of adversity,  
Which like the toad, ugly and venomous,  
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head.<sup>2</sup>*

An expression of the Lord is even more explicit: "After much tribulation come the blessings." (D&C 58:4.) William Penn summarized in four words: "No cross, no crown."<sup>3</sup>

Finally, to the adult, to the aged and the disabled, the gateway of death may lead to welcome release from the infirmities of physical imprisonment. The gateway opens to opportunities newly born. Well worth the working and the waiting are the possibilities of heavenly homecoming, family reunion, resurrection, immortality, and eternal life.

## THE GATEWAY WE CALL DEATH

### NOTES

1. Cited by Spencer W. Kimball in *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), p. 98.
2. William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, act 2, scene 1.
3. This is the title of a pamphlet published by William Penn in 1669. John Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992), p. 282.

## CHAPTER 8

# FACTORS OF CHOICE IN LONGEVITY

THE GREATEST GIFT FROM GOD to immortal man is eternal life. His greatest gift to mortal man is life itself. Next to that is his gift of agency. That includes freedom to choose the right—or the wrong. Many are the funerals that I have attended of former friends and classmates who made a deliberate choice earlier in life *not* to obey the Word of Wisdom. They died of diseases associated with the use of tobacco or alcohol, or both. The probabilities are that they would have lived longer if they had made different choices. Without initially realizing the consequences of their choices, their lives were shortened thereby.

If our Creator had forced us to be obedient, or careful, or righteous, the fundamental law of agency would be null and void. Spiritual growth and self-mastery would have been impossible.

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In the beginning the Creator explained to Moses: "Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him." (Moses 4:3.) "It is given unto [thy children] to know good from evil; wherefore they are agents unto themselves." (Moses 6:56.)

Many people opt to append the adjective *free* to describe agency. But the expression "free agency" is not scriptural terminology. Scripture refers only to "moral agency." The Lord said that "every man may act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the *moral agency* which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment." (D&C 101:78; emphasis added.)

Moral agency goes hand in hand with moral accountability. Decisions of a moral nature are based on faith in the Lord, the giver of moral law. The Word of Wisdom is part of that divine code of moral law. It is spiritual in nature. Obedience to it carries physical rewards as well.

Incidentally, I have often wondered if God's children would be just as obedient to that revelation if it were *not* known to be beneficial to one's health. When Abraham and

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Isaac were commanded to enact their sacrificial scene, did they first ask if God's test was certain to be beneficial to Isaac's health? No! They obeyed because of their faith in God and their desire to obey, regardless of risk.

Our faith and obedience will be rewarded with divine protection as we navigate through the turbulent waters of life. We are reminded of God's presence during trials in this verse from "How Firm a Foundation":

*When through the deep waters I call thee to go  
The rivers of sorrow shall not thee o'erflow  
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,  
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.<sup>1</sup>*

The Lord made this remarkable promise regarding choice and longevity: "He that hath faith in me to be healed, and is not appointed unto death, shall be healed." (D&C 42:48.) President Spencer W. Kimball added this commentary: "If one is not 'appointed unto death' and if sufficient faith is developed, life can be spared. But if there is not enough faith many die before their time. It is evident that even the righteous will not always be healed and even those of great faith will die when it is according to the

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purpose of God. Joseph Smith died in his thirties as did the Savior. Solemn prayers were answered negatively.”<sup>2</sup>

Many times I am asked by brethren in the Church what special regimen I would recommend to prolong their mortal lives. I usually respond with this quotation from the oath and covenant of the priesthood: “Whoso is faithful unto the obtaining these two priesthoods of which I have spoken, and the magnifying their calling, are sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies.” (D&C 84:33.) I know of no better choice in preparing for a full and useful life. I have seen this promise realized time and time again.

What about the sisters? They are entitled to the same blessings as the brethren when they keep the commandments of God: “The body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” (Romans 8:10.) Regardless of gender, physical and spiritual blessings come to those who avoid strong drink and harmful substances, including tobacco. Faithful men and women respect their bodies as holy temples with proper nutrition and care, appropriate exercise, rest as the Lord has recommended,

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chastity, and moral fidelity. Longevity is likewise enhanced for those who choose to honor their parents.

## WHAT ABOUT SUICIDE?

Perhaps no topic touches on the importance of choice in longevity as directly as does that of suicide.<sup>3</sup> The act of taking one's own life is truly a tragedy because it creates so many victims. Family and countless friends are left to bear feelings of undeserved misery and guilt. The commandment "Thou shalt not kill" is written in nine verses of scripture.<sup>4</sup> Not one of them grants self-exclusion. The rational mind knows it is wrong.

Unfortunately, forces of stress and depression incite behavior that is not always rational. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote: "Persons subject to great stresses may lose control of themselves and become mentally clouded to the point that they are no longer accountable for their acts. Such are not to be condemned for taking their own lives. It should also be remembered that judgment is the Lord's; he knows the thoughts, intents, and abilities of

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men; and he in his infinite wisdom will make all things right in due course.”<sup>5</sup>

We know that the good done and the desires of the heart will also be weighed when final judgment is rendered. Alma taught: “The plan of restoration is requisite with the justice of God; for it is requisite that all things should be restored to their proper order. Behold, it is requisite and just, according to the power and resurrection of Christ, that the soul of man should be restored to its body, and that every part of the body should be restored to itself.

“And it is requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged according to their works; and if their works were good in this life, and the desires of their hearts were good, that they should also, at the last day, be restored unto that which is good.” (Alma 41:2–3.)

How grateful we can be that the infinite atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ applies so broadly. “His blood atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam, who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned.” (Mosiah 3:11.)

The Prophet Joseph Smith offered this remarkable

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insight regarding judgment: "While one portion of the human race is judging and condemning the other without mercy, the Great Parent of the universe looks upon the whole human family with a fatherly care and paternal regard; He views them as His offspring. . . . He is a wise Lawgiver, and ~~will judge all men;~~ not according to the narrow, contracted notions of men, but, 'according to the deeds done in the body whether they be good or evil,' or whether these deeds were done in England, America, Spain, Turkey, or India. . . . We need not doubt the wisdom and intelligence of the Great Jehovah; He will award judgment or mercy to all nations according to their several deserts, their means of obtaining intelligence, the laws by which they are governed, the facilities afforded them of obtaining correct information, and His inscrutable designs in relation to the human family; and when the designs of God shall be made manifest, and the curtain of futurity be withdrawn, we shall all of us eventually have to confess that the Judge of all the earth has done right."<sup>6</sup>

Elder M. Russell Ballard, who studied this topic extensively, wrote, "I draw an important conclusion from the words of the Prophet [Joseph Smith]: Suicide is a sin—a

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very grievous one, yet the Lord will not judge the person who commits that sin strictly by the act itself. The Lord will look at that person's circumstances and the degree of his accountability at the time of the act.<sup>77</sup>

Repentance operates in the spirit world as well as on earth. President Joseph F. Smith saw in vision the work of salvation proceeding among those who have passed from this sphere of mortality. He wrote: "The faithful elders [and sisters<sup>8</sup>] of this dispensation, when they depart from mortal life, continue their labors in the preaching of the gospel of repentance and redemption, through the sacrifice of the Only Begotten Son of God, among those who are in darkness and under the bondage of sin in the great world of the spirits of the dead.

"The dead who repent will be redeemed, through obedience to the ordinances of the house of God,

"And after they have paid the penalty of their transgressions, and are washed clean, shall receive a reward according to their works, for they are heirs of salvation." (D&C 138:57–59.)

Suicide is a choice—a grievous choice—that abbreviates longevity. Its victims include those who suffer because

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of that choice. They need and deserve the reassurance of the gospel and the knowledge that life for their loved one continues. Immortality of the soul applies to all, as does the privilege of repentance and forgiveness.

## WHAT ABOUT EUTHANASIA?

In recent times, the topic of euthanasia, or mercy killing, has received increasing public attention. I mention it here only to condemn it. The same commandment cited previously, "Thou shalt not kill," does not except the halt, the lame, the elderly, or the terminally ill. Merciful as it may seem superficially, the choice to take an innocent life cannot be reposed with any person or panel of specialists. No human can create life; no human can qualify to take it away under the guise of pity or piety.<sup>9</sup> Society must not create a board of "expert exterminators."

Only "the light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God who sitteth upon his throne" (D&C 88:13), may be empowered to extinguish the light of mortal life from those who are ill.

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Medical knowledge should help the sick to endure to the end, but never to create that end.

### PROLONGATION OF LIFE BY MEDICAL MEANS

We live in a modern medical era of sophisticated life-support systems, intensive-care units, and expert physicians skilled in the care of those who are critically ill. One of my distinguished friends and medical colleagues, Dr. Benson B. Roe, wrote: "An adversarial stance against death is, of course, an asset to the physician's role in combatting disease and 'saving lives.' One would hardly want physicians to be cavalier about people dying, or even to be less than completely dedicated to avoiding premature death.

Medical science takes justifiable pride in making lives longer, safer, and more comfortable.

"It is, however, unrealistic and, I believe, irresponsible for our profession to carry this . . . philosophy beyond the expectations of salvaging a meaningful existence for a significant period of time."<sup>10</sup>

Dr. Roe's statement alludes to the question of propri-

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ety in extending special technical capabilities (including mechanical life-support systems) to those who are terminally ill. I agree. If a patient is indeed terminally ill with no hope for recovery, there is no need to feel an obligation to seek or to continue such support. Each individual is destined to die. Death is part of life. It should be accorded the dignity it deserves. Medical care for the dying patient should mercifully offer reasonable palliation and relief from discomfort.

In my many years of experience caring for those who are critically ill, this question of prolongation of life was usually resolved without much anguish. Quiet and calm conversations between physicians and families were very helpful. If the patient had a reasonable chance—even a remote chance—for real recovery, the decision was usually made to try for that objective. If, on the other hand, recovery was not realistically possible, rarely did any participant in such a discussion wish for means to be employed that were deemed to be unreasonable.

Consultation with the Lord in prayer is a vital part of all important decision making. Those who are able to attend the temple will find the House of the Lord to be a

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sacred setting in which such matters may be prayerfully pondered. Counsel with members of the family, local church leaders, or trusted friends is very helpful.

Sometimes such decisions require immediate action. How useful it is under those circumstances to have reviewed these possibilities with the family in advance of an emergency. A living will or discussions with dependents beforehand can be a thoughtful gesture of preparation for stressful times that may lie ahead.

Large as those decisions may loom at the moment, the consequences are less time-sensitive when viewed from an eternal perspective. More important than the length of life is the quality of life. And more important than worldly accomplishment is fidelity to God, family, and country. Fidelity to God includes ordinances made and covenants obeyed that qualify one for that greatest gift of eternal life, regardless of another hour, day, or week of life-support on a mechanical respirator.

More and more families are providing opportunity for their loved one who is terminally ill to pass through life's exit gateway in comfortable surroundings at home. These

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choices are shaped to the individual circumstance. They pertain to propriety as well as longevity.

### NOTES

1. Attributed to Robert Keen, *Hymns*, no. 85.
2. Spencer W. Kimball, "Tragedy or Destiny," *Improvement Era*, March 1966, p. 178.
3. Another such topic might be that of *choice* to perform an elective abortion on demand. In that circumstance, the choice of one individual terminates the life of another—its helpless victim.
4. See Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17; Matthew 5:21; Romans 13:9; Mosiah 13:21; 3 Nephi 12:21; D&C 42:18–19; 132:36.
5. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), p. 771.
6. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 218.
7. M. Russell Ballard, "Suicide: Some Things We Know, and Some We Do Not," *Ensign*, October 1987, p. 8.
8. On another occasion, President Smith said that the good, faithful sisters of this dispensation will also participate in the missionary cause. See *Gospel Doctrine*, p. 461.
9. Note that I do not refer to societal demands for criminal justice—a topic unrelated to euthanasia.
10. Benson B. Roe, "Physician Attitudes about Death," *The Pharos*, Winter 1991, p. 32.

## CHAPTER 9

# LIFE AFTER DEATH

EACH TIME I ATTEND A FUNERAL, I see tears of sadness occasioned by separation from a loved one. Especially am I touched by the weeping of children in demonstration of their sweet special love and pure grief. How I long to comfort them! Often they ask questions pertaining to the whereabouts of their dear one. There seem to be more questions than answers. How thankful we are that the Lord has revealed important information to satisfy our yearnings to know more about the future—act three of our drama of life.

Job also asked the ultimate question: “If a man die, shall he live again?” (Job 14:14.) The answer is a resounding yes! That gift was provided by the Savior and Redeemer of mankind. His atonement literally made the resurrection a reality. He pronounced a promise: “Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live,

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ye shall live also." (John 14:19.) Without the infinite atonement of Christ, "this flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more." (2 Nephi 9:7.)

The resurrection of Jesus Christ crowned his mission to do the will of his Father. One of the best-attested facts in history is that of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In one conference address, I took occasion to recount many of the well-documented testimonies of those who had witnessed the risen Redeemer.<sup>1</sup> The total number is substantial.

A Book of Mormon prophet made this statement: "If Christ had not risen from the dead, or have broken the bands of death that the grave should have no victory, and that death should have no sting, there could have been no resurrection.

"But there is a resurrection, therefore the grave hath no victory, and the sting of death is swallowed up in Christ." (Mosiah 16:7–8.)

The keys of the resurrection repose securely with our Lord and Master. He said: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall

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he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” (John 11:25–26.)

That marvelous prospect is a gift from our Redeemer to each of us.

## PARADISE

Obvious is the fact that elements of the physical body decompose and return to the earth. Less obvious is the fact that “the spirits of all men, as soon as they are departed from this mortal body, yea, the spirits of all men, whether they be good or evil, are taken home to that God who gave them life.

“And then . . . the spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise, a state of rest, a state of peace, where they shall rest from all their troubles and from all care, and sorrow.” (Alma 40:11–12.)

A verse of Old Testament scripture capsulizes these two concepts: “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.” (Ecclesiastes 12:7.)

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Of course no one knows exactly where the spirit world is located. At the funeral of patriarch James Adams, the Prophet Joseph Smith said that "Brother Adams has gone to open up a more effectual door for the dead. The spirits of the just are exalted to a greater and more glorious work; hence they are blessed in their departure to the world of spirits. Enveloped in flaming fire, *they are not far from us*, and know and understand our thoughts, feelings, and motions, and are often pained therewith."<sup>2</sup>

Other prophets and Church leaders have also stated that the spirit world is on or near the earth. Its location may be less important than its actuality. All who pass through the gateway of death go immediately into the spirit world. This was true of Jesus and the penitent thief who also expired on a cruel cross. Prior to their passing, Jesus said unto him, "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43.)

There each spirit continues to live and is busily engaged. Shortly before the end of his mortal life, President Joseph F. Smith announced in general conference his remarkable vision of the redemption of the dead. Revealed to him was information regarding activity in the spirit

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world: “I beheld that the faithful elders [and sisters] of this dispensation, when they depart from mortal life, continue their labors in the preaching of the gospel of repentance and redemption, through the sacrifice of the Only Begotten Son of God, among those who are . . . in the great world of the spirits of the dead.” (D&C 138:57.)<sup>3</sup>

President Smith explained: “The righteous spirit that departs from this earth is assigned its place in the Paradise of God; it has its privileges and honors which are in point of excellency, far above and beyond human comprehension; and in this sphere of action, enjoying this partial reward for its righteous conduct on the earth, it continues its labors, and in this respect is very different from the state of the body from which it is released. For while the body sleeps and decays, the spirit receives a new birth; to it the portals of life are opened. It is born again into the presence of God.”<sup>4</sup>

We know that those spirits are capable of choice, of repentance, and of preparation for the day of resurrection. They remain “in paradise, until the time of their resurrection.” (Alma 40:14.) Then “the spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form.” (Alma 11:43.)

## RESURRECTION

Yes, compounds derived from dust—elements of the earth—are combined to make each living cell in our bodies. This is one of the marvels of our creation. Likewise, it will be one of the marvels of our resurrection. The miracle of the resurrection is matched only by the miracle of our creation in the first place.

No one knows precisely how two germ cells unite to make one. Nor do we know how that resulting cell multiplies and divides to make others—some to become eyes that see, ears that hear, or fingers that feel glorious things about us. Each cell contains chromosomes with thousands of genes, chemically ensuring the identity and independence of each individual. Our bodies undergo constant rebuilding according to genetic recipes that are uniquely ours. Each time we take a bath, we lose not only dirt but also cells dead and dying, as they are replaced by a newer crop. This process of regeneration and renewal is but prelude to the promised phenomenon and future fact of our resurrection.

In faith, Job answered his own question: "For I know

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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." (Job 19:25-26.)

Job's prophecy foretells a reunion of the eternal spirit with the recreated body. The spirit will come from its temporary home in paradise. The body will be resurrected. Scripture so explains: "O how great the plan of our God! . . . The paradise of God must deliver up the spirits of the righteous, and the grave deliver up the body of the righteous; and the spirit and the body is restored to itself again, and all men become incorruptible, and immortal, and they are living souls, having a perfect knowledge like unto us in the flesh, save it be that our knowledge shall be perfect." (2

2 Nephi 9:13.

We know that those who reside in the world of departed spirits will have opportunity to learn of the gospel of Jesus Christ. "Marvel not at this," John recorded, "for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they

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that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”  
(John 5:28–29.)

Such long-range vision was also provided by the apostle Paul, who taught the Corinthians, while citing the example of the resurrected Lord, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”  
(1 Corinthians 15:19–22.)

Near the end of his life, President Joseph F. Smith was allowed to receive that remarkable vision regarding the redemption of the dead. He wrote: “Their sleeping dust was to be restored unto its perfect frame, bone to his bone, and the sinews and the flesh upon them, the spirit and the body to be united never again to be divided, that they might receive a fulness of joy.” (D&C 138:17.)

The Book of Mormon prophet Alma revealed considerable detail about life after physical death. He wrote: “Now, there is a death which is called a temporal death; and the death of Christ shall loose the bands of this

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temporal death, that all shall be raised from this temporal death.

“The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame, even as we now are at this time; and we shall be brought to stand before God, knowing even as we know now, and have a bright recollection of all our guilt.

“Now, this restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous; and even there shall not so much as a hair of their heads be lost; but every thing shall be restored to its perfect frame, as it is now, or in the body, and shall be brought and be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil.

“Now, behold, I have spoken unto you concerning the death of the mortal body, and also concerning the resurrection of the mortal body. I say unto you that this mortal body is raised to an immortal body, that is from death, even from the first death unto life, that they can die no more; their spirits uniting with their bodies, never to be

## LIFE AFTER DEATH

divided; thus the whole becoming spiritual and immortal, that they can no more see corruption." (Alma 11:42–45.)

Alma's explanation provides reassurance especially comforting to families of those who died because of traumatic disruption of their bodies. He taught: "The soul shall be restored to the body, and the body to the soul; yea, and every limb and joint shall be restored to its body; yea, even a hair of the head shall not be lost; but all things shall be restored to their proper and perfect frame." (Alma 40:23.)

Knowledge of the resurrection of the dead presents to the informed mind enlightened concepts of hope, love, and joy. The appreciation of that glorious state almost defies description. John the Revelator wrote of his vision of the possibility of our eventual reunion with the Savior of the world: "I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." (Revelation 21:3–4.)

## THE GATEWAY WE CALL DEATH

When those who weep for the loss of a loved one are fully able to comprehend these concepts, their tears of separation may literally be turned to tears of anticipation. Joyful reunions await those who prepare for them.

## JUDGMENT

The Redeemer explained that his gospel and his atonement provided not only for our resurrection, but also for our eventual judgment.

"I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me.

"And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—

"And for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore, according to the power of the Father I will draw all men

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unto me, that they may be judged according to their works." (3 Nephi 27:13–15.)

Judgment will be facilitated by our own "bright recollection" and "perfect remembrance" of life's deeds. To that will be added the modulating influence in consideration of the innermost desires of our hearts. (See Alma 11:43; 5:18.)

## THREE DEGREES OF GLORY

Eventual judgment will be followed by assignment to glory, of which there are different degrees. The Savior alluded to that concept when he said: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:2–3.)

His apostle Paul explained: "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead." (1 Corinthians 15:41–42.)

## THE GATEWAY WE CALL DEATH

That brief outline was dressed in greater detail by the Lord as he revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith the truths contained in the seventy-sixth section of the Doctrine and Covenants. (See D&C 76:64–81.) There we learn of the celestial, terrestrial, and celestial degrees of glory. As it pertains to celestial glory, the Lord revealed that there are gradations within that kingdom. (See D&C 131:1–2.) The Prophet added this comment: “In the resurrection, some are raised to be angels, others are raised to become Gods.”<sup>5</sup>

## IMMORTALITY AND ETERNAL LIFE

The Lord clearly declared his own mission in mortality when he stated: “This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.” (Moses 1:39.) His infinite atonement provided resurrection from the dead and immortal life to all mankind. His gift of the possibility of eternal life is conditional. It is predicated upon repentance and qualification through the keeping of covenants made in connection with the sacred ordinances of the temple. It means a whole new way of living on earth to prepare for eternal life in celestial realms above.

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“Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.”  
(2 Nephi 31:20.)

The glory of individual immortality and eternal life is the real reason for the creation of the earth and all that dwells upon it. And when an individual is found worthy, “then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”  
(Matthew 25:34.)

Those who die after the age of accountability and before covenants could be made in the temple may be accorded the privilege of temple ordinances performed for them vicariously. We are to seek out our own kindred and do their work for them in the true “spirit of Elijah.”  
(2 Kings 2:15.)

As I meet with Saints throughout the world, I am asked some interesting questions. Occasionally someone wants to know if his or her favorite activities will be available in the

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celestial glory, such as skiing, golf, surfing, tennis, mountain climbing, or other recreation that seems so important to them now. I give the best answer I know: "I don't know."

But I do know that the "same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy." (D&C 130:2.)

Moreover, I know that husband and wife—faithful to covenants made in the temple—are heirs to this promise:

"If a man marry a wife by my word, which is my law, and by the new and everlasting covenant, and it is sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise, by him who is anointed, unto whom I have appointed this power and the keys of this priesthood; and it shall be said unto them—Ye shall come forth in the first resurrection; . . . and shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths . . . to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever." (D&C 132:19.)

Passage through the gateway of death is required in order to permit these glorious blessings to be realized.

## LIFE AFTER DEATH

### NOTES

1. See Russell M. Nelson, "Life after Life," *Ensign*, May 1987, pp. 8–10.
2. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 326; emphasis added.
3. The bracketed phrase has been added because President Smith wrote that sisters will also be accorded the privilege of ministering and preaching in the world of spirits as are the elders referred to in this revelation. See *Gospel Doctrine*, p. 461.
4. *Gospel Doctrine*, p. 440.
5. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 312.

CHAPTER 10

## THE VEIL IS SOMETIMES THIN

THE GATEWAY OF DEATH may not be governed by a door as heavy and shut as it seems. It may be softly veiled by a billowy curtain or a delicate drape. The Prophet Joseph Smith referred to the “veil of death.”<sup>1</sup> Certainly communication through the gateway between this world and the next is not closed. Prophets and apostles treat such transfer of intelligence as a very sacred matter, and rarely speak openly about it. Some disclosures have been made, however, and serve to illustrate how near we may be to those who have departed.

President Brigham Young honored his predecessor, Joseph Smith, in many ways. Perhaps Joseph’s ability to blend heaven and earth would be among the foremost. President Young wrote: “I never saw any one, until I met Joseph Smith, who could tell me anything about the char-

## THE VEIL IS SOMETIMES THIN

acter, personality and dwelling-place of God, or anything satisfactory about angels, or the relationship of man to his Maker. Yet I was as diligent as any man need to be to try and find out these things.

"What is the nature and beauty of Joseph's mission? You know that I am one of his Apostles. When I first heard him preach, he brought heaven and earth together; and all the priests of the day could not tell me anything correct about heaven, hell, God, angels, or devils; they were as blind as Egyptian darkness. When I saw Joseph Smith, he took heaven, figuratively speaking, and brought it down to earth; and he took the earth, brought it up, and opened up, in plainness and simplicity, the things of God; and that is the beauty of his mission. I had a testimony, long before that, that he was a Prophet of the Lord, and that was consoling. Did not Joseph do the same to your understandings? Would he not take the Scriptures and make them so plain and simple that everybody could understand? Every person says, 'Yes, it is admirable; it unites the heavens and the earth together,' and as for time, it is nothing, only to teach us how to live in eternity."<sup>2</sup>

Brigham Young was not the only leader to be deeply

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impressed with the Prophet's seership. Another contemporary penned this statement: "[Wilford Woodruff] referred to a saying of Joseph Smith, . . . That if the People knew what was behind the veil, they would try by every means . . . that they might get there, but the Lord in his wisdom has implanted the fear of death in every person that they might cling to life and thus accomplish the designs of their creator."<sup>3</sup>

At the funeral of President Jedediah M. Grant, President Heber C. Kimball relayed extensive information that President Grant had conveyed about his visit into the spirit world. (Both President Grant and President Kimball served as counselors to President Brigham Young.) The record of President Kimball's remarks reads: "[Brother Grant] said to me, brother Heber, I have been into the spirit world two nights in succession, and, of all the dreads that ever came across me, the worst was to have to again return to my body, though I had to do it. But O, says he, the order and government that were there! When in the spirit world, I saw the order of righteous men and women; beheld them organized in their several grades, and there appeared to be no obstruction to my vision; I could see

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every man and woman in their grade and order. I looked to see whether there was any disorder there, but there was none; neither could I see any death nor any darkness, disorder or confusion. He said that the people he there saw were organized in family capacities; and when he looked at them he saw grade after grade, and all were organized and in perfect harmony. He would mention one item after another and say, 'Why, it is just as brother Brigham says it is; it is just as he has told us many a time.'

"That is a testimony as to the truth of what brother Brigham teaches us, and I know it is true, from what little light I have.

"He saw the righteous gathered together in the spirit world, and there were no wicked spirits among them. He saw his wife; she was the first person that came to him. He saw many that he knew, but did not have conversation with any except his wife Caroline. She came to him, and he said that she looked beautiful and had their little child, that died on the Plains, in her arms, and said, 'Mr. Grant, here is little Margaret; you know that the wolves ate her up, but it did not hurt her; here she is all right.'

"To my astonishment,' he said, 'when I looked at

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families there was a deficiency in some, there was a lack, for I saw families that would not be permitted to come and dwell together, because they had not honored their calling here.'

"He asked his wife Caroline where Joseph and Hyrum and Father Smith and others were; she replied, 'they have gone away ahead, to perform and transact business for us.' The same as when brother Brigham and his brethren left Winter Quarters and came here to search out a home; they came to find a location for their brethren.

"He also spoke of the buildings he saw there, remarking that the Lord gave Solomon wisdom and poured gold and silver into his hands that he might display his skill and ability, and said that the temple erected by Solomon was much inferior to the most ordinary buildings he saw in the spirit world.

"In regard to gardens, says brother Grant, 'I have seen good gardens on this earth, but I never saw any to compare with those that were there. I saw flowers of numerous kinds, and some with from fifty to a hundred different colored flowers growing upon one stalk.' We have many

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kinds of flowers on the earth, and I suppose those very articles came from heaven, or they would not be here.

"After mentioning the things that he had seen, he spoke of how much he disliked to return and resume his body, after having seen the beauty and glory of the spirit world, where the righteous spirits are gathered together."<sup>4</sup>

President Brigham Young, preaching at the funeral of Elder Thomas Williams on July 19, 1874, provided additional insights. He first cited questions often asked about conditions in the world to which we will go: "Shall we have labor? Shall we have enjoyment in our labor? Shall we have any object of pursuit, or shall we sit and sing ourselves away to everlasting bliss?"

Then President Young gave this response: "I [will] have passed from a state of sorrow, grief, mourning, woe, misery, pain, anguish and disappointment into a state of existence, where I can enjoy life to the fullest extent as far as that can be done without a body. My spirit is set free, I thirst no more, I want to sleep no more, I hunger no more, I tire no more, I run, I walk, I labor, I go, I come, I do this, I do that, whatever is required of me, nothing like pain or weariness, I am full of life, full of vigor, and I enjoy the

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presence of my heavenly Father, by the power of his Spirit.”<sup>5</sup>

Moving from messages of apostles of the nineteenth century to those of the twentieth, I would like to relate a personal experience with Elder Hugh B. Brown. It is sacred to me, and was also to him. Elder Brown had served earlier as a member of the First Presidency where, along with countless other matters, he had borne responsibilities relating to the building of the Washington Temple. I suppose that some of the decisions that had to be made did not go unchallenged.

President Spencer W. Kimball extended an invitation to Elder Brown to attend the dedication of that temple in November 1974. As a physician, I had been invited to accompany Elder Brown, now enfeebled due to advanced age. Months prior to his passing on December 2, 1975, I received his permission to record this experience, from which I quote:

“On the morning of the temple dedication, President Brown greeted me [R. M. N.] with the news that he had been visited during the night by President Harold B. Lee (President Lee had died the year before).” Elder Brown

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"described it as a glorious visit, one that meant much to him, for President Lee had been aware of some of the difficulties encountered by President Brown in the decisions that led to the construction of the temple in Washington, D.C.

"Later that morning, as we took President Brown to breakfast, Sister Harold B. (Freda Joan) Lee approached us. As we exchanged greetings, President Brown said to her, 'I had a glorious visit with Harold last night. He is just fine. It was so good to visit with him.'

"This was such a moving experience for us all. We felt the presence of President Lee's spirit in the temple through the witness of President Brown."<sup>6</sup>

More recently, Elder David B. Haight spoke at a general conference of the Church, following his miraculous recovery from a life-threatening illness. His surgical repair and prolonged convalescence had been fortified by the faith and prayers of many people in his behalf. Elder Haight first described some of that initial catastrophic experience when he was on the verge of death. Then he said:

"The terrible pain and commotion of people ceased. I was now in a calm, peaceful setting; all was serene and

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quiet. I was conscious of two persons in the distance on a hillside, one standing on a higher level than the other. The person on the higher level was pointing to something I could not see.

"I heard no voices but was conscious of being in a holy presence and atmosphere. During the hours and days that followed, there was impressed again and again upon my mind the eternal mission and exalted position of the Son of Man. I witness to you that He is Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, Savior to all, Redeemer of all mankind, Bestower of infinite love, mercy, and forgiveness, the Light and Life of the world. I knew this before—I had never doubted or wondered. But now I knew, because of the impressions of the Spirit upon my heart and soul, these divine truths in a most unusual way."<sup>7</sup>

No doubt many of us are aware of additional accounts of communication from the deceased to friends or family members living here in mortality. While the validity of such accounts may not always be easy to ascertain, there can be little doubt that our loved ones are near in spirit. Their watchful eye is indicated by this scriptural account of a heavenly perspective: "I have no greater joy than to

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hear that my children walk in truth." (3 John 1:4.) From such parental love, we are separated only by the thin veil draped from the gateway.

### NOTES

1. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 56.
2. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, comp. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 458–59.
3. A. Karl Larson, and Katharine Miles Larson, eds., *Diary of Charles Lowell Walker 1* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1980), pp. 465–66. Note: Charles Lowell Walker wrote the words to the hymn "Dearest Children, God Is Near You," *Hymns*, no. 96.
4. Heber C. Kimball, *Journal of Discourses* 4:135–36.
5. Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* 17:142.
6. Russell M. Nelson, *From Heart to Heart* (Salt Lake City, 1979), p. 188.
7. David B. Haight, "The Sacrament—and the Sacrifice," *Ensign*, November 1989, pp. 59–60.

CHAPTER 11  
RESOLUTIONS  
FOR THE LIVING

THE PROPHET JOSEPH SMITH stated: "Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it; and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God."<sup>1</sup> That objective includes immortality and eternal life with him as his faithful sons and daughters. Meanwhile, we struggle along through act two of life's three-act drama. Each of us has obtained a physical body. Each of us endures trial and tribulation. Each of us prepares for future exigencies with life insurance, wills, trusts, and all that may be needed to organize business affairs. Time is both fleeting and precious.

We who tarry here have a few vanishing moments remaining to prepare to meet God. Unfinished business is our worst business. Perpetual procrastination must yield

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to perceptive preparation.) The prophet Amulek testified: "This life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors."

Then he added: "Do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed.

"Ye cannot say, when ye are brought to that awful crisis, that I will repent, that I will return to my God. Nay, ye cannot say this; for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world." (Alma 34:32–34.)

Complete repentance brings complete forgiveness. The Lord gave this promise to the penitent sinner: "None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live." (Ezekiel 33:16.)

Though we can do little to postpone physical death, we can prevent the possibility of "spiritual death, yea, a

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second death, . . . cut off again as to things pertaining to righteousness." (Helaman 14:18.)

Today we have a little more time to bless others—time to be kinder, more compassionate, quicker to thank and slower to scold, more generous in sharing, more gracious in caring. Since happiness is the object of our existence, taking time to smell the roses is advisable. Joy is a journey, not a destination.

*Travel the path*

We travel along life's highway with family and friends, but let us not forget our forebears. The more we know about our ancestors, the more we know about ourselves. Today while we are able, we may turn our hearts to parents and predecessors and bless them with our love—and labor. Those we call dead are not dead at all. They are alive—on the other side of the veil. Family ties can continue beyond death because of ordinances performed in the temple. While our kindred wait for us, for what do we wait? Where do we begin? Important advice was given by President Boyd K. Packer, who said: "I came to see that any one of us by himself can care about them, all of them, and love them."<sup>2</sup> President Packer thus identified the true starting point in this great vicarious work.

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Some among us still have perceived neither the spirit of Elijah nor its power. Yet we are bound by this warning: "Now, my dearly beloved brethren and sisters," saith the Lord, "let me assure you that these are principles in relation to the dead and the living that cannot be lightly passed over, as pertaining to our salvation. For their salvation is necessary and essential to our salvation, as . . . they without us cannot be made perfect—neither can we without our dead be made perfect." (D&C 128:15.) *We need each other*

This doctrine and its ordinances are laden with love and are intended to perpetuate the sweetest of life's relationships—in families forever. Just as Jesus gave his life vicariously for each of us, we can serve vicariously for our kindred.

For our beloved ancestors, perhaps we cannot do everything, but we can do something. Meanwhile, we may keep ourselves free from the bondage of sin, worthy and able to endure to the end. Then, when our turn comes to pass through the gateway, we can say as did Paul: "The time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." (2 Timothy 4:6-7.) *Strive to the end*      *to God in Christ* *Covenants*

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We need not look upon death as an enemy. The anticipation of its arrival need not hold us hostage. With full understanding and preparation, faith supplants fear. Hope displaces despair. The Lord said, "Fear not even unto death; for in this world your joy is not full, but in me your joy is full." (D&C 101:36.) May we be reminded of his tender affection for us: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." (John 14:21.)

With the security of his love, we find strength to endure. If we harbor feelings of guilt or hopelessness, we can change. We may generate renewed hope. Moroni said, "How is it that ye can attain unto faith, save ye shall have hope? And what is it that ye shall hope for? Behold I say unto you that ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal, and this because of your faith in him according to the promise." (Moroni 7:40–41.)

The gospel of Jesus Christ provides hope for all in this wailing world. "Now, what do we hear in the gospel which we have received? A voice of gladness! A voice of mercy

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from heaven; and a voice of truth out of the earth; glad tidings for the dead; a voice of gladness for the living and the dead; glad tidings of great joy." (D&C 128:19.)

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints invite all to come unto Christ and be sanctified in him. He said, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." (John 11:25-26.)

Such conviction includes enduring conversion. A prophet so explained: "Ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life." (2 Nephi 31:20.)

The happiness found in this life is only a sample of the everlasting joy that awaits us later. If any of us mourn for lost loved ones today, we can be comforted and know that in due time "God shall wipe away all tears . . . and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain." (Revelation 21:4.)

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Each of us is well known to the Lord. With his holy help, our deeds and desires will qualify us to receive blessings promised to the faithful: everlasting joy, glory, immortality, and eternal lives.

As one of the “special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world” (D&C 107:23), I testify that he lives! I also testify that the veil of death is thin. I know by experiences too sacred to print that those who have gone before are not strangers to leaders of the Church. To us and to you, our loved ones may be just as close as the room nearby, separated only by the gateway to immortality and eternal life. Together we are soothed by the caress of our Savior’s love. “Peace I leave with you,” he said. “My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (John 14:27.) He promised: “I will not leave you comfortless.” (John 14:18.)

### NOTES

1. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 255.
2. Boyd K. Packer, *The Holy Temple* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), pp. 238–39.

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- Factors of choice, such as suicide, euthanasia, and use of mechanical means to extend life
- Life after death

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*The Gateway We Call Death* provides reassurance and comfort for all who seek such understanding.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Russell M. Nelson has served as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles since April 1984. A native of Salt Lake City, he received B.A. and M.D. degrees from the University of Utah and a Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota. A renowned cardiovascular and thoracic surgeon, medical researcher, and educator, he served as president of the Society for Vascular Surgery, chairman of the Council on Cardiovascular Surgery for the American Heart Association, and president of the Utah Medical Association.

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