

# *A Disposition to Do Good Continually*

SPENCER J. CONDIE

**A**s a little boy, a favorite activity in my grandparents' home was climbing upon my grandfather's lap to have him read children's stories from the Book of Mormon. Grandpa Condie read slowly and deliberately, and I felt the spirit of the Book of Mormon and easily associated the Savior's love for me as Grandpa lovingly held me close to him.

One of my favorite stories was the account of venerable King Benjamin, who called upon all of his loyal subjects to gather around the temple, where he would give them his parting counsel. He reminded the people four times that he had received the text of his talk from an angel of the Lord, and the speech he delivered is one of the greatest in all of holy writ (see Mosiah 3:2, 4:1, 4:11, 5:5).

At the heart of King Benjamin's benedictory address was the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Though the Savior would not be born on earth for another 124 years, King Benjamin spoke "as though [Christ] had already come among them" (Mosiah 3:13; see also 2 Nephi 25:26; Jarom 1:11; Mosiah 16:6).

He described the Savior's future earthly mission in detail, of how He would

*suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every*

*pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people.*

*And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary.*

*And lo, he cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men even through faith on his name. [Mosiah 3:7–9]*

As Benjamin concluded the sermon given him by an angel, the multitude fell to the earth as they

*viewed themselves in their own carnal state. . . . And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying: O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins . . . ; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. [Mosiah 4:2]*

## **Filled with Joy**

*And it came to pass that after they had spoken these words the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins. [Mosiah 4:3]*

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Being “filled with joy” is one of the reassuring hallmarks that we have received a remission of our sins. Alma taught that “wickedness never was happiness” (Alma 41:10), and this statement is akin to the predictability of the law of gravity. It is virtually impossible to be filled with joy while we are entertaining evil thoughts or wicked practices.

Alma taught the inhabitants of Zarahemla that a mighty change of heart should be reflected by the image of Christ in their countenances (see Alma 5:14). Now, some of us—myself included—were born with a face only a mother could love; but it can still be a happy face.

*As a beauty I'm not a great star,  
There are others more handsome by far,  
But my face, I don't mind it,  
Because I'm behind it—  
'Tis the folks in the front that I jar.*

[Anthony Henderson Euwer, “My Face,” in *Rhymes of Our Valley* (New York: James B. Pond, 1916), 92]

One of the signs of having received a remission of sins is a joyful heart and a cheerful countenance.

### **Peace of Conscience**

A second sign of receiving a remission of sins is reflected by the “peace of conscience” that Benjamin’s people experienced “because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ who should come” (Mosiah 4:3).

As an old man, my list of past sins is so long that I cannot begin to remember them all. But the list is so long I can’t forget them all either. But I *can* remember them with a peace of conscience.

### **Filled with the Love of God**

Benjamin assured his listeners that

*as ye have come to the knowledge of the glory of God, or if ye have known of his goodness and have*

*tasted of his love, and have received a remission of your sins . . .*

[then] *ye shall always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of your sins.* [Mosiah 4:11–12; emphasis added]

Hearts filled with love become a third confirmation that our sins are forgiven.

A heart filled with love has no room for discouragement, doubt, fear, hatred, vengeance, envy, lust, or greed, because a heart full of love is *full*.

### **No Mind to Injure**

King Benjamin described a fourth indicator of retaining a remission of our sins, and that is that we “*will not have a mind to injure one another, but to live peaceably*” (Mosiah 4:13; emphasis added). Not having a mind to injure one another is reflected by our overcoming even the very inclination to put others down, to tell jokes defaming a given ethnic group, or to speak of a roommate or a spouse or any others in unflattering terms.

Brother David M. Sorensen has been engaged in counseling and marital therapy for many years. He once told me he has seen hateful, hurtful marriage relationships “turn on a dime” when couples merely agree to be *kind* to each other for a day, a week, a month, and then a lifetime.

### **Teach Our Children**

A fifth hallmark of retaining a remission of our sins is that

*[we] will not suffer [our] children that they go hungry, or naked; neither will [we] suffer that they transgress the laws of God, and fight and quarrel one with another. . . .*

*But [we] will teach them to walk in the ways of truth and soberness; [we] will teach them to love one another, and to serve one another.* [Mosiah 4:14–15]

### **The Wadsworths of Panaca, Nevada**

Franklin Don Wadsworth was an enterprising young man from Nevada who met a lovely young woman from Salt Lake City by the name of Sylvia Hinckley. They were soon married, and they were blessed with 11 children: seven sons and four daughters. When the youngest son, David, was seven years of age, his lovely mother died suddenly at age 49. Notwithstanding this tragic and untimely loss, the Wadsworth children rallied around their heartbroken father, providing great comfort to him and to each other. Then, just 17 months later, not long after David was baptized, his father died at age 56, leaving eight unmarried children at home.

The relatives counseled together, and it was decided that one uncle and his wife would take some of the children into their home and another uncle and aunt would care for the rest of the children in their home.

At this point the Wadsworth children met in family council, with the oldest son, Franklin Brent, taking charge. The children unanimously agreed that their deceased parents would not want them to be separated and unable to see each other frequently during their formative years. Their parents had taught them to serve one another and to be responsible for one another, so they declined any outside help. The members of the extended family agreed to stand back and let them give it a try.

Lark was in her third year in high school, and the school allowed her to take all of her classes early in the day so she would be home in time to welcome the younger children when they arrived home from school. Valerie was in the process of graduating from college, and she found a job nearby and helped with the younger children for the first year. Scott was a returned missionary, and he worked the family farm and commuted to Cedar City, where he attended college.

All of the children eventually went to college, and all of the sons served missions.

When only two children—David, then 14, and Charlotte, then 17— remained living at home, they were invited by their older sister Terry and her husband, Lorell Bleak, to live with their family.

Though Don and Sylvia Wadsworth were snatched from their mortal existence prematurely, they had taught their children by precept and example that true joy comes from loving and serving others and placing the needs of others above their own. Now in postmortality Don and Sylvia claim a rich posterity of 106 grandchildren and 80 great-grandchildren.

### **Succor Those in Need**

A sixth measure of our remission of sins, according to King Benjamin, is that we “will succor those that stand in need of [our] succor,” that we “impart of [our] substance to the poor, . . . feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief” (Mosiah 4:16, 26). In this regard, giving generous fast offerings and emulating the lifelong ministry of our beloved President Thomas S. Monson readily come to mind.

### **Do Good Continually**

At the conclusion of King Benjamin’s forthright counsel, the people

*all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us . . . because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually. [Mosiah 5:2; emphasis added]*

This is the test of retaining a remission of our sins: we overcome any inclination to do evil, supplanting it with a sustained disposition to do good continually. This is the demonstration of discipleship.

The Savior humbly testified: “I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, . . . I do always those things that please him” (John 8:28–29). His was a disposition to do good continually.

Now, some contend that because Christ was the Son of God He was exempt from temptation, but that belief is contrary to the scriptural record of His earthly ministry. We are all aware of His temptations by Satan after fasting for 40 days in the wilderness (see Matthew 4:1–11). And just prior to entering the Garden of Gethsemane, he expressed His gratitude to Peter, James, and John, who, said the Savior, “have continued with me in my temptations” (Luke 22:28).

The Apostle Paul wrote of Jesus Christ, who “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Alma foresaw the Savior “suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind . . . that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:11–12).

How was the Savior able to resist and transcend all these temptations of the flesh? We read in Doctrine and Covenants 20:22: “He suffered temptations but gave no heed unto them.” Because of the Savior’s divine disposition to do good continually, no temptation nor bitter cup could distract Him or dissuade Him from performing His divine mission.

The well-known British cleric Frederic Farrar observed:

*The only difference between the temptations of Christ and our own is that His came from without, but ours come also from within. In Him “the tempting opportunity” could not appeal to “the susceptible disposition.”* [Frederic William Farrar, *The Life of Lives: Further Studies in the Life of Christ* (London: Cassell and Company, 1900), 251; emphasis added]

Our goal in life should be to overcome the susceptible disposition.

### **The Pulling Power of Covenants**

Within the restored kingdom of God on earth, the making and keeping of covenants is a central doctrine and practice with a divine purpose in helping us develop a disposition to do good continually. Covenants are the promises to keep the Lord’s commandments, and they are an integral part of gospel ordinances. The word *ordinance* shares etymological roots with the word *order*, and so it is that ordinances help order our lives in such a way that we prioritize the use of our time, our means, and our talents in serving Heavenly Father’s other children and assisting in the building of His kingdom. It is through the ordinances of the priesthood that the powers of godliness are manifest unto men in the flesh. (See D&C 84:19–21.)

Captain Moroni declared: “I, Moroni, am constrained, according to the covenant which I have made to keep the commandments of my God” (Alma 60:34). There is a pulling power inherent in keeping covenants, a power that pulls us onward and ever upward toward our celestial home. It is not only important but also indispensable that we frequently renew our covenants in sacrament meeting and in the temple, reminding us of the Lord’s “exceeding great and precious promises” (2 Peter 1:4) contingent upon our obedience to His commandments.

Covenants are kept when we *feel* the promises we renew. It is then that doing good continually no longer becomes a tedious task but rather a daily delight.

President David O. McKay was fond of reminding the Saints:

*Sow a thought, and you reap an act;  
Sow an act, and you reap a habit;  
Sow a habit, and you reap a character;  
Sow a character, and you reap a destiny.*

[Quoted by Samuel Smiles (1812–1904) in *Life and Labor* (1887)]

### **Heiko Mazurek**

Twenty-five years ago Heiko Mazurek was a young German music student in Vienna, Austria. One day he was walking down the street when a Book of Mormon display caught his eye. So he stopped to talk with the missionaries, and they gave him a copy of the Book of Mormon. He began to read it and to accept the missionary discussions. Eventually he was baptized.

Shortly after his baptism he moved back to his home in Germany to accept a teaching position in a music school. As the mission president at the time, I was concerned that a new convert might get lost in the shuffle of moving away so shortly after baptism. I called Heiko's new stake president and asked him if he could give Heiko some special attention to assure that he remained active and committed to the kingdom.

A few weeks after Heiko's arrival in Germany, his caring stake president invited him to travel three hours by train to a Saturday stake priesthood meeting to share his conversion story with the brethren. Heiko accepted the invitation with much fear and trepidation.

He'd never spoken to a large audience before, so the evening prior to his appointed speech Heiko spent a rather sleepless night tossing and turning. When the alarm clock finally rang, he turned it off and promised himself he would just sleep for a few more minutes and then get up. (Does this sound familiar?) However, he was so exhausted from his fitful night's sleep that he awoke too late to catch the last morning train in time to arrive at the stake center to give his talk.

He hurriedly dressed and rode his bike to the small airport outside of town, and although he was a financially struggling musician, he chartered a small plane for \$400 to fly him to his destination.

The stake president phoned me in Vienna after the meeting and described how Heiko had arrived all out of breath, but he gave a wonderful and inspiring testimony, and all in attendance were grateful for the sacrifice he had made to attend.

Several months later Heiko visited us in Vienna, and he recounted his experience of chartering a plane to the priesthood meeting. When he concluded, I asked: "Heiko, why didn't you just call up President Rueckauer and tell him you would not be able to make it to the meeting and that you would be willing to speak on some future occasion?"

Heiko looked at me indignantly as he said: "President Condie, when the missionaries taught me the gospel, they explained the importance of commitments and of making covenants, and they said that when we make a promise to the Lord or one of His servants, we are expected to keep our word." (See Spencer J. Condie, *In Perfect Balance* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004], 127–29.) To this day Heiko continues striving to do good continually, and Church members still introduce him to their nonmember friends as "the legendary guy with the airplane."

### **The Prodigal's Brother**

The parable of the prodigal son illustrates in bold relief a wide variety of human dispositions. First there is the self-centered prodigal son unconcerned with anyone or anything but himself. But, alas, after riotous living he discovered for himself that "wickedness never was happiness," and "he came to himself" (Luke 15:17). He eventually realized whose son he was, and he yearned to be reunited with his father.

His arrogant, selfish disposition had given way to humility and a broken heart and contrite spirit as he confessed to his father: "I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son" (Luke 15:21). Gone were the adolescent rebellion, the

immature selfishness, and relentless pleasure seeking, and in their place was an embryonic disposition to do good continually. Now, if we are completely honest with ourselves, we will each confess that there is, or has been, a bit of the prodigal son in every one of us.

Then there is the father. Some may criticize him for having been overly indulgent in granting the younger son's request to "give me the portion of goods that falleth to me" (Luke 15:12). The father in the parable was undoubtedly sensitive to the divine principle of moral agency and freedom of choice, a principle over which the premortal War in Heaven had been waged. He was not inclined to compel his son to be obedient.

But this loving father never gave up on his wayward son, and his unrelenting vigilance is confirmed in the poignant narration that when the son "was yet a great way off, his father . . . had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him" (Luke 15:20). Not only was there an open display of physical affection toward his son, but the father requested his servants to give him a robe, shoes for his feet, and a ring for his hand and instructed them to kill the fatted calf, joyfully declaring, "He was lost, and is found" (Luke 15:24).

Throughout the years this father had continually developed such a compassionate, forgiving, loving disposition that he could do nothing else but love and forgive. This parable is a universal favorite for all of us because it holds out the hope to each one of us that a loving Father in Heaven stands in the roadway, as it were, anxiously awaiting the arrival of each of His prodigal children back home.

And now to the older, obedient son who protested to his forgiving father:

*Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:*

*But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. [Luke 15:29–30]*

Just as there may be an element of the prodigal son in each of us, it may also be the case that every one of us is tainted with traits of the older son. The Apostle Paul described the fruit of the Spirit as "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, [and] temperance" (Galatians 5:22–23). While it may well be that the older son had, indeed, been obedient to his father, beneath the obedient surface was seething subterranean self-righteousness and a disposition to be judgmental, covetous, and totally lacking in compassion. His life did *not* reflect the fruit of the Spirit, for he was not at peace but rather greatly distressed at what he perceived to be a gross inequity of treatment.

### **Judged After Our Ways**

The mighty prophet Ezekiel taught that if a righteous man

*trust to his own righteousness, and [then] commit iniquity, all his [righteous acts] shall not be remembered. . . .*

*But if the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby.*

*Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal [or equitable]. O ye house of Israel, I will judge you every one after his ways. [Ezekiel 33:13, 19–20; emphasis added]*

This great prophet taught the people that the Righteous Judge of us all is not computing a running total of all our good deeds from which all of our evil deeds will be subtracted. Rather, we will be judged "after [our] ways"—our way of life and our dispositions to do either good or evil (see Ezekiel 18:21–27, 33:13–20.)

In 2005 the CEO of a large business corporation was sentenced to 25 years in prison for

defrauding his company and its shareholders of \$11 billion. His defense attorney pointed out that over the years his client had contributed \$95 million to charitable causes, and then he asked the judge: “If you live 60-some-odd years, if you have an unblemished record, if you have endless numbers of people who attest to your goodness, doesn’t that count?” (Bernard Ebbers’ defense lawyer Reid Weingarten, in Erin McClam, “WorldCom’s Ebbers Weeps at 25-Year Sentence,” Associated Press, 13 July 2005; <http://iinternational.org/showCnews.php?id=70&reference=page%3D65>).

Ezekiel would likely respond that, actually, those good deeds do *not* count for much, because overshadowing all of the good deeds of the *distant* past—like the mission in Taiwan or Texas—are the more egregious, dark deeds of the *recent* past. King Benjamin would perhaps share the observation that this particular individual still had an unfettered disposition to do evil on a grand scale. He had inflicted great suffering upon numerous employees, shareholders, and clients whose trust had been betrayed at a terrible personal cost to each of them. In the process of becoming, he had become a crook.

As a second prophetic voice, Elder Dallin H. Oaks teaches us that *testimony* involves believing and feeling, whereas *conversion* includes doing and becoming. To quote Elder Dallin H. Oaks:

*The Final Judgment is not just an evaluation of a sum total of good and evil acts—what we have done. It is an acknowledgment of the final effect of our acts and thoughts—what we have become. [“The Challenge to Become,” Ensign, November 2000, 32; emphasis in original]*

### **Brother Wakolo’s Disciple’s Soul**

While serving in the South Pacific, I received a letter from the First Presidency with an assignment to travel to Fiji and deliver a letter

to Taniela Wakolo, president of the Nausori Fiji Stake. After I handed the letter to him, he read aloud the call from the First Presidency to serve as an Area Seventy, and tears flowed freely from his cheeks and those of his lovely wife, Anita.

After discussing with him the nature and duties of his new calling, I observed the tattoo on Brother Wakolo’s large right hand. Now, tattoos are very common throughout the South Pacific, and long before he joined the Church, Taniela Wakolo had the back of his hand tattooed with a large, garish design.

I said: “Brother Wakolo, in your new calling as an Area Seventy, you are going to be speaking to the youth on many occasions. I would suggest before such meetings that you put a large Band-Aid on the back of your hand to cover your tattoo. It’s hard to discourage our youth from getting tattoos when the speaker has one himself.”

He smiled a broad smile, and with a radiant expression he said, “I’ll take care of it. I want to be a good example.”

A few weeks passed, and the next time we met, his hand was heavily bandaged as if he were preparing for a boxing match. I asked, “What in the world happened to you?”

He smiled with glistening eyes and said, “I followed your counsel and had the tattoo removed.”

“Was it laser surgery?” I asked.

“No,” he replied with a big smile, “they don’t remove tattoos with lasers in Fiji. I had it surgically cut out.”

A month later Elder Wakolo and I were assigned together to reorganize a stake presidency in American Samoa. As we met at the airport, I immediately noticed an unsightly scar on the back of his hand where the surgeon had removed several square inches of skin and then very crudely sutured the gaping wound closed. This had not been performed by a plastic surgeon.

I apologized for having been the cause of the large scar on the back of his hand. He responded with a radiant Christlike countenance: “Not to worry, President Condie; this is my CTR ring. Now the Lord knows where I stand! I’ll do anything the Lord asks of me.”

Elder Wakolo has become a disciple who keeps his covenants and strives to do good continually.

My precious young brothers and sisters, I invoke the blessings of heaven upon each and every one of you of the rising generation and pray that your righteous thoughts and deeds will overcome any susceptible disposition to do evil and that the Holy Spirit will be your constant companion in helping you to develop a disposition to do good continually, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.