

“True Doctrine, Understood, Changes Attitudes and Behavior”

TODD B. PARKER

Good morning. My thanks go to those who provided the music this morning. Their music has helped to bring the Spirit to this meeting. I would hope to speak by that Spirit today.

My late friend Robert J. Matthews, who taught religion here at BYU, used to say, “If I speak by the Spirit and you listen by the Spirit, you will hear things better than I say them.” I pray that that can happen today.

I thought it appropriate to begin with a little poem written by a young man that I think might illustrate what sometimes may happen in parents’ attempts to change the behavior of their children. He wrote:

My parents told me not to smoke—

I don’t.

Nor listen to a naughty joke—

I don’t.

They made it plain I must not wink

At pretty girls, or even think

About intoxicating drink—

I don’t.

To dance and flirt is very wrong—

I don’t.

Wild youths chase women, wine and song—

I don’t.

I kiss no girls, not even one—

I do not know how it is done—

You wouldn’t think I had much fun—

I DON’T.

["I Don’t," *Goldendale Sentinel* (Klickitat County, Washington), 24 October 1918, 1, gld.stparchive.com/Archive/GLD/GLD10241918P01.php]

Now, you see that this young man’s behavior was changed, but not his attitude. What is needed is a change in attitude as well as behavior. So I pose this question: What causes a change in attitude and behavior?

President Boyd K. Packer stated:

True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior.

The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior. . . . That is why we stress so forcefully the study of the doctrines of the gospel.

["Little Children," *Ensign*, November 1986, 17]

The purpose of my presentation today is to explore four points of doctrine as found in the scriptures and in the words of the Brethren.

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Principle Number 1: Draw upon the Power of the Word Daily

The prophet Mormon wrote:

And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God. [Alma 31:5]

When I taught seminary years ago, I wanted to show the youth the power of the word that Alma described. I wanted to show them that if they would make the word of God (as found in the scriptures) a part of their lives, it would change them. I didn't know exactly how to do that, but I tried this way.

On the first day of class I gave them a blank sheet of paper and said to them, "Be honest in your writing here. I'm not going to look at this. This is for you only. Write down your honest feelings about religion—about God, Christ, Joseph Smith, the First Vision, the Church, or anything you want. Fold it over, staple it, and put your name and date on the outside. I will file it away and save it for you, but I will give it back to you at the end of the year."

For the next nine months we studied the scriptures every day. We marked them. We noted them. The students were challenged to pray every day, morning and night, on their knees, out loud, and read a chapter of scripture each day on their own for nine months.

On the last day of class I gave them a sheet of paper (I don't even know if they remembered doing this at the beginning of the year), and I said, "Now don't try to impress anybody here. Just be honest. Write your feelings about God, the Church, Christ, the gospel, or anything you'd like."

When they got done, I handed them back their previous papers from nine months earlier. They opened them up and made a comparison.

I hadn't intended to read any of them, but a girl named Julie came to me with tears in her eyes and said, "I want you to see this."

Here was her first response:

I guess I sometimes wonder if Christ really does live. I don't know for sure, and I have always wondered since I was old enough to even think about it. . . . I also wonder if this is the true church or not. Everything we are told to do seems right, but I still have doubts.

After nine months of studying the scriptures in seminary, she wrote, in part:

I know God lives and His Son, Jesus Christ, is my Brother and He knows me and He cares about me. Through prayer I know He will guide us and show us the right way through His prophets, who I know are called of God. I know He loves each of us in a very special way.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the only true church, and I know it without a doubt. It was restored by Joseph Smith, who I know was a true prophet.

I counted nine times that she said, "I know." That is the power of the word in a young lady's life.

I had a similar experience in a fifth-period class, later in the day. An afternoon class in a hot climate is not always the optimal setting for keeping students' attention. As a matter of fact, this class was a particular challenge to me. As I considered my role in their temporal salvation (because they seemed so impossible to reach), I thought that the only way I could ever help save them would be to wait until they all died and then do work for the dead. That, however, was not a viable option. But I gave them the same challenge I had given the rest of the classes and continued to teach them.

At the end of the year a young man named Larry, who was in that fifth-period class, came to me and said, "You might want to look at this."

Here is his first response:

I don't really know there's a God. I only go to church to make my mom and dad happy. I wish I had a testimony, but I don't. Sometimes I feel like I have an important job on earth, but I don't know what it is. I'm always wanting to do something wrong.

I am an eyewitness to the “always wanting to do something wrong” part.

Nine months later this young man wrote:

I know the Church is true. I have a testimony of it. I love my Big Brother and my Heavenly Father, and I know They live. I know Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, and I have a testimony of it.

I love this church with all my life. Some say they do not know if they would give their life for it, but I know—if need be, and my Father willed it—I would.

That is the power of the word in a young man's life.

President Ezra Taft Benson promised:

When individual members and families immerse themselves in the scriptures regularly and consistently, these other areas of activity will automatically come. Testimonies will increase. Commitment will be strengthened. Families will be fortified. Personal revelation will flow. [“The Power of the Word,” Ensign, May 1986, 81]

I add my testimony that there is power in the word that can be drawn upon daily.

Principle Number 2: Let the Scriptures and the Holy Ghost Tell You All Things That You Should Do

The prophet Nephi wrote:

*Feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will **tell** you **all things** what ye should do. . . .*

*. . . Receive the Holy Ghost, [and] it will **show** unto you **all things** what ye should do. [2 Nephi 32:3, 5; emphasis added]*

I would like to try to illustrate this principle with a personal experience.

Many years ago an invitation had come to me to leave our home in Utah, where I was teaching seminary, and move to Arizona to teach institute in Tucson. My wife and I had prayerfully decided this was the right thing to do. It was a little frightening to leave parents, friends, and security and move to a desert land where we knew no one.

We traveled to Tucson to find our new home. Upon our arrival in Tucson we met with a real estate agent. After days of searching we could find nothing in our price range that even came close to meeting our family's needs—as far as location, neighborhood, schools, and so on. I wasn't used to “desert landscape.” The homes had cactus and rock gardens instead of trees and grass lawns. My faith that this move was the right decision began to waver. We were out of options and out of time. The agent suggested that we pick one or two of the homes we liked, revisit them, and make a decision. The problem was that I hadn't liked any of them. I was depressed and heartsick. I needed help. I couldn't sleep.

In the motel room, in the middle of the night, I turned to the scriptures for help. I read from several places, including Hebrews 11, about faith. Nothing seemed to help. Then it happened. I was reading Ether 12 in the Book of Mormon about faith. I came to verse 32. I read, “And I also remember that thou hast said that thou hast prepared a house . . .”

I stopped. I looked up. The Lord had spoken to my soul. A house was prepared. I didn't know how or where or what was to happen, but I knew a house was prepared. I didn't say anything to my wife.

The next morning we met the agent and drove to a house out on Bear Trail that my wife remembered as being a possibility of something that might work. As we drove up on a rock driveway, an enormous reptile dropped off a saguaro cactus right in front of the house

and scurried off into the desert. I remember thinking, “Is this reptile a future playmate for my young children?”

We surveyed the house. Debbie went inside while I checked over the outside.

I noticed the roof shingles were corroded from the leaking swamp cooler. The cedar fence was propped up by two-by-four boards. There was a crack in the foundation. The swimming pool was filled with black algae.

I thought, “Well, this is it. We need to decide.”

No one was near, so I knelt in prayer. I begged for the Lord to let me know if this was the “house prepared.” As I opened my eyes and arose from my knees, I saw a magazine stuck in a bush. Could the magazine contain direction? I went to the bush and opened the magazine. It was a pornographic magazine. I closed the magazine, put it back in the bush, went into the house, and announced to my wife, “This is not the house.”

My wife said, “How do you know?”

I said, “It’s a ‘bush’ thing. I’ll explain later.”

We then returned to the agent’s car to check out one new listing. En route to the new listing we passed through a neighborhood that reminded me of our home in Utah. There were sidewalks, lawns, and children playing. The street had such a good spirit about it. I asked the agent if there was anything for sale in this area.

She said, “No.”

We rounded a corner, and I saw a house with a “for sale” sign.

I asked, “What about this one?”

She said, “I have no idea. It is not listed.”

We copied down the number and made a call. The agent asked the owner why it wasn’t listed. She said they were planning to sell but that the home wasn’t ready to show. But for “some reason” her agent had come early that morning and posted the “for sale” sign. Our agent asked if we could come see it. She agreed to let us come right then.

After we pulled into the driveway and got out of the car, I said to my wife, “This is the house. I know it. I couldn’t be any more sure than Moses and the burning bush.”

She looked at me and said, “This bush thing again?”

We loved the house. Through the agent we made an offer. We returned to the motel to wait for the agent’s call. I was sitting by the swimming pool at the motel. The agent finally called and told us they had accepted our offer. I was ecstatic. I said I wanted to take pictures of the home to show our children, but I had no idea of the address of the property. I asked if she could give it to me.

The agent said, “Do you have something to write on?”

I did, and she gave me the address.

The address was 1509 South Burning Tree Avenue.

I said, “Burning Tree as in Burning Bush?”

She said, “Yes.”

I about fell in the pool.

A house had been prepared. The Lord had spoken to my soul through Ether 12:32.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks said:

*The idea that scripture reading can lead to inspiration and revelation opens the door to the truth that a scripture is not limited to what it meant when it was written but may also include what that scripture means to a reader today. Even more, scripture reading may also lead to current revelation on whatever else the Lord wishes to communicate to the reader at that time. We do not overstate the point when we say that the scriptures can be a Urim and Thummim to assist each of us to receive personal revelation. [“Scripture Reading and Revelation,” *Ensign*, January 1995, 8]*

I add my testimony that, as Nephi said, through the words of scripture and the Holy Ghost you can be told and shown all things you should do.

Principle Number 3: Use the Scriptures to Chase Darkness from Your Life

Doctrine and Covenants 50:23–25 reads:

And that which doth not edify is not of God, and is darkness.

That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light. . . .

. . . And I say it that you may know the truth, that you may chase darkness from among you.

Many years ago I was teaching released-time seminary. Life was good. I was married to a wonderful woman. We had been blessed with four small children. I was blessed to study and teach from the scriptures every day.

I came home from school one day to discover we were expecting child number five. There was good news and bad news. The good news was the blessing of another child. The bad news was that my wife got extremely ill during pregnancies. I knew it was going to be a rough road ahead. It seemed that everything that could go wrong did go wrong during the first three months of Debbie's pregnancy. This included the following:

1. Debbie was sick with morning sickness. She was in bed for more than four weeks and couldn't even sit up.
2. I had taken a leave of absence from teaching seminary to get my doctoral degree. I was back in graduate school carrying fifteen credit hours.
3. I was attempting to fill the role of mother while Debbie was ill. This included cleaning the house, doing laundry, fixing meals, tending kids, running errands, fulfilling nursemaid duties, and so on.
4. The dishwasher broke. I had no money to repair it. Dishes were done by hand.
5. Jana got an ear infection. She couldn't hear me. I had to take her to the doctor.

6. I had to "farm out" the two youngest girls—ages two and four—during the day for different ward members to tend.

7. Because of all of the turmoil, I was up five to six times each night helping Debbie and consoling the children.

8. Jeremy, then age six, was throwing rocks at an icicle on the front of the house and broke the large picture window in the living room.

9. Jeremy also was chasing Jana and bumped a shelf of figurines. They crashed to the floor. My wife asked, "What was that?" I said, "Oh, nothing, dear." The pile of pieces remained in a box for weeks awaiting the day when I would have time to glue them back together—which never happened.

10. Julie, age two, became ill. I took her to the doctor.

11. I had to take Debbie to the hospital several times for intravenous hydration. With all the vomiting, she got dehydrated regularly.

12. I was always at least 500 pages behind in my reading.

13. I was supposed to be doing a literature search for my dissertation.

14. I was serving as elders quorum president. Many hours of service were required.

15. Other things happened. A wind came up and blew the screen door right off the front of our house. It was lying out in the driveway.

16. I was in an education class in which I had to practice giving individualized intelligence tests. I tested most of the kids in the neighborhood. I began to doubt my own intelligence.

17. The straw that broke the camel's back, I think, was that our scruffy little mongrel dog named Fluffy began her breeding cycle. We had no fence. It seemed as if we had male dog visitors from everywhere, all enamored with Fluffy.

I was at an all-time low. When you are at the bottom, there is no more bottom. I was

drowning, being pulled down by an overwhelming whirlpool of duties that I couldn't keep up with. And in the process I hadn't opened a book of scripture in more than four weeks. Prior to all of this I had committed to teach an adult evening class on the Book of Mormon. It was too much. I felt I couldn't do it, but I was committed.

So the night before the class was to begin, I found myself preparing during the only quiet time available: between midnight and 2 a.m. After about an hour of study I suddenly stopped. Something was different—very different. It took a few moments for me to realize what was happening. Then it came to me like a revelation from heaven. For the first time in four weeks I wasn't depressed. It was also the first time in four weeks that I had immersed myself in scripture study. Because of the tailspin of life I had found myself in, I felt I had no time to study the scriptures. I was barely surviving day to day. I felt it was impossible to allot any time for scripture study.

I submit to you that the following words of President Spencer W. Kimball are true:

*There are blessings that come from immersing ourselves in the scriptures. The distance narrows between ourselves and our Father in Heaven. Our spirituality shines brighter. We love more intensely those whom we should love. It is much easier to follow counsel. The lessons of life are learned more readily and surely. ["Men of Example," address to religious educators, Temple Square Assembly Hall, 12 September 1975, 2; included in *Charge to Religious Educators*, 3d ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1994), 23]*

I witnessed the blessing of immersing myself in the scriptures. I testify that the light from the Book of Mormon helped chase darkness from me. I acknowledge that scripture study alone cannot resolve all despair and

depression, but I do know that when I was finally compelled “to act” and “not to be acted upon” (see 2 Nephi 2:26), it was the keystone—the Book of Mormon—that led me back to the Cornerstone, Jesus Christ (see Ephesians 2:20).

Principle Number 4: During Scripture Study, Search for Types of Christ

The prophet Nephi said:

Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ . . . ; and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him. [2 Nephi 11:4]

I know his statement to be true. When we can grasp the ideas that Christ is the Master Teacher, the universe is His classroom, and the curriculum is the Atonement, we will never read the scriptures the same way again.

I believe you can find types of Christ in events, travels, topography, seasons, people, names, and so forth. For example, in the Bible Dictionary under “Pauline Epistles” for the book of Hebrews, we read that Israel's journey typifies our journey toward eternal life (see 6b). Israel left Canaan, went to Egypt, and fell into bondage. They were led from bondage by Moses, were purified in the desert, and then returned to their home in Canaan. Likewise, we leave God's presence, enter a fallen telestial world, are delivered from spiritual bondage by Jesus, pass through a purifying terrestrial millennium, and return to God's celestial presence.

Let's look at Moses as a symbol or type of Christ and compare the two deliverers. Moses was Israel's physical deliverer. Jesus is our spiritual deliverer.

Moses's first plague to get Israel out of Egypt was turning water into blood. Jesus's first miracle in His ministry was turning water into wine.

Moses's last plague was the death of the firstborn. Jesus's last miracle was the resurrection of the Firstborn.

How did Moses free Israel from Egyptian bondage? He had the Israelites take a lamb—male, unblemished, firstborn, with no broken bones—and sacrifice this lamb by shedding its blood. The Israelites then put the blood of the lamb on the lintel and the two side posts of each of their doors. When they did that, the destroyer passed over them. The blood of the lamb saved them from physical death. In our lives we have to accept the Lamb of God—Jesus Christ—and symbolically put the blood of His Atonement on the doorframes of our lives. The blood of the Lamb of God will save us from spiritual death.

Those lambs used for sacrifice had to be firstborn. I don't know if you have considered Jesus's birth in the light of His being the Lamb of God. To whom did the angels go to announce the birth of the Lamb of God? Specific shepherds were assigned to tend the flocks of sheep to be used in temple sacrifice. Only certified firstborn lambs could be used. The shepherds were the eyewitnesses of which lambs were firstborn. So when the Lamb of God was born, where did the angels go? To the shepherds. Why? Because that was their job—to witness the birth of firstborn lambs.

Moses tells us in Leviticus 1:11 that the lambs to be used for sacrifice were to be slain on the north side of the altar. Where do you suppose Jesus, the Lamb of God, was sacrificed? The Crucifixion took place just north of the temple altar in Jerusalem at a place called Golgotha. The Lamb of God was sacrificed north of the temple altar. All things testify of Christ.

After Israel left Egyptian bondage, they went to the borders of the Red Sea. In the movie *The Ten Commandments*, Yul Brynner played the part of Pharaoh and said, "The god of Moses is a poor general to leave him no retreat."

Not really. Moses went there on purpose. Why? Because they had to go through the Red Sea. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:1–2 that Israel passing through the Red Sea was a symbol of a baptism by water and a baptism by fire. Israel was saved by water. That is why there had to be a wall of water on each side. Israel was "baptized by immersion" in the Red Sea. The fire held the Egyptians back. Hence Israel was also saved by fire. It is the same with each of us. We need to be saved through a baptism of water and a baptism of fire.

When Israel got to the borders of the Red Sea, the pillar of fire came around behind them. There was first a separation of light and darkness. It was light to the Israelites going through the Red Sea, but it was darkness to the Egyptians. What did God do on the first day of creation? He separated the light from the darkness. What did God then do on the second day of creation? He separated the waters from the waters. What did Moses do? He separated the waters from the waters, and Israel went through on dry ground.

They went into the wilderness. The wilderness is a symbol of purification. They were there forty years. When we get into the Millennium, we will have a thousand years of purification.

What did they eat while they were in the wilderness? They ate manna. What is manna? It is bread from heaven. Who is Jesus? He is the Bread of Life. Where did He come from? Heaven. And where was He born? He was born in Bethlehem. And what does the name Bethlehem mean? Bethlehem means "House of Bread." By chance? I don't think so.

What did they drink? They drank water. Who is the Living Water? It is Jesus (see John 4:14). Where did they get the water? From a rock (see Exodus 17:6). Who is the rock? The Rock is Christ (see Helaman 5:12). By chance? I don't think so.

When Israel went into the promised land, they went through the Jordan River. Why go

through a river? You have to be “born again” (see John 3:1–5). Who led them through the river? It was Joshua. Joshua is the Hebrew name for the Greek word *Jesus*. It was “Jesus” who caused them to be born again and led them through the Jordan River back home to the land of their fathers. They crossed the river at Bethabara—the same place where Jesus would later be baptized. That section of the Jordan River is the lowest body of freshwater on earth. Elder Russell M. Nelson taught that Jesus’s baptism at Bethabara symbolized His descending below all things (see “Self-Mastery,” *Ensign*, November 1985, 32). All things testify of Christ.

Consider names—simple names, like Joseph Smith. Joseph in Hebrew is Yoseph. Yoseph means “may God add sons.” A “smith” is someone who forges or fashions or beats something out of raw material. So if you are God and you want to establish a kingdom out of raw material and then add sons to it, how do you describe that? “Joseph Smith.”

What does Hyrum mean? Hyrum means “my brother is exalted.” By chance? I don’t think so.

Consider the seasons. When was Joseph born? Joseph was born at the winter solstice, when light is coming into the world. What was the sign to the Nephites when Jesus was born? It was three days of light. When was Joseph killed? Joseph was killed at the summer solstice, when light is going out of the world. What was the sign to the Nephites at Jesus’s death? It was three days of darkness. All things testify of Christ.

Moses 6:63 states, “All things . . . bear record of [Christ], both things . . . in the heavens above, . . . on the earth, . . . in the earth, and . . . under the earth.”

The sun itself is a type of Christ. It comes from the east. Christ will also come from the east. The sun gives light and life to all things. Its heat can also consume all things. (Those who live in Arizona understand that.) It does

both. The Light of Christ gives “life to all things” (D&C 88:13). Christ’s glory will also consume the wicked at His Second Coming (see D&C 5:19). People whose lives are filled with darkness will be destroyed by the light. People whose lives are full of light will be saved by that light—“as by fire,” to use Nephi’s words (1 Nephi 22:17). Doctrine and Covenants 88:25 states that “the earth abideth the law of a celestial kingdom.” Well, what does the earth do? The earth revolves around the sun (s-u-n). What should we do if we are to abide by the law of a celestial kingdom? Our lives should also revolve around the Son (s-o-n).

The universe was designed to testify of Christ. Consider hibernation. Every creature—every squirrel, insect, snake, or bear—that hibernates and lies dormant during the winter appears to be dead. Each one that comes alive again in the spring testifies of Christ and His Resurrection. Every tree, every plant, every leaf that becomes green each spring—all testify of Christ. Do you think it was by chance that all of these things come to life after appearing to be dead at the same time of year when Jesus came alive again? I don’t think so. All things testify of Christ.

Why do you go to bed at night? Because you are tired? No. You symbolically die every night.

Why do you get up in the morning? To go to school? No. You symbolically resurrect every morning.

Have you ever looked at your roommates when they are sleeping? They look dead. Arising from sleep every morning is a symbol we are so close to that we don’t even recognize that we symbolically resurrect every morning. Those of you who have roommates who sleep past noon now know why we have to have the morning and the afternoon of the First Resurrection. That’s just a joke, but it is no joke that “all things . . . are the typifying of him” (2 Nephi 11:4). All things testify of Christ. I add my testimony that that is true.

In conclusion I would like to issue a challenge—one last heartfelt plea. Forty-two years ago I made a terrible mistake. I was a student at a nearby university. On this very day, January 20, at this very hour, I was standing beside my mother's hospital bed. She was dying. She was in a coma, in an intensive care unit, following complications from surgery. I was holding her hand and praying that she would regain consciousness. I longed to tell her that I loved her. I had been prompted by the Spirit several times before her surgery to do so, but I had resisted the prompting. I had reflected on the last time I had said those words to her. To my best recollection I was in third grade. I had written a little poem: "Of all the mothers kind and true, you are the best and I love you."

My mother died forty-two years ago tomorrow on January 21, 1973. I lost a great

opportunity as a result of resisting a prompting of the Spirit. How does that apply to you here today? My hope is that each one of you today has felt a prompting of the Spirit—hopefully a prompting to improve your life through scripture study. My prayer is that you will respond to that prompting of the Spirit and not resist it. I pray that you will not carry with you a regret of resisting a spiritual prompting like I have all these years.

My challenge to you is to study the scriptures daily, draw upon the word daily, let the words of Christ tell you all things that you should do, and drive darkness from your life. May you always remember that all things testify of Christ. I pray that your consequent understanding of true doctrine will change both your attitude and your behavior. And I say this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.