

# “Wisdom and Great Treasures of Knowledge”

LANCE B. WICKMAN

Up until now I have always believed that the toughest of all speaking assignments is to be the Friday-night speaker at a three-day youth conference! The youthful audience is looking for “cake and ice cream,” and the assignment is to serve up “meat and potatoes.” But as I gaze out at this large assembly here on the BYU campus on an August morning—in the very heart and heat of the summer—I believe that this assignment today is even *more* difficult than that!

Perhaps it is because I cannot help but wonder why you are all here! Some have traveled a considerable distance. Almost all have taken precious vacation days. So, why *here*? Why *Education Week*? Why not waterskiing? Or the beach? (Some of you may be asking that very question right about now!) If you think about it for a moment, I believe you will agree that it really is a pretty good question. Why *did* you choose Education Week over some recreational activity or simply lying adrift on a plastic air mattress in a backyard swimming pool?

In a way, I believe that the answer is reflected in the theme of this conference—Finding “Wisdom and Great Treasures of Knowledge, Even Hidden Treasures” (D&C 89:19). In a very real sense the answer to that question—*What am I doing here?*—is what I would like to address. The fact is, brothers and

sisters, that you are here instead of somewhere else because for you there is more to life than the proverbial “news, weather, and sports.”

Some years ago, I had some responsibility for the open house and dedication of the San Diego California Temple. One Saturday afternoon, one of our committees for the open house was holding a meeting in a stake center adjacent to a large sectarian chapel. The parking lots for these two buildings are contiguous, resulting in an immense expanse of asphalt between them. I thought it was quite remarkable that our committee meeting was so well attended at a time when most people are outside playing—especially in San Diego! Then, I walked into the foyer of our building. Through the glass doors I had a panoramic view of that large parking area and the other church’s meetinghouse. To my surprise the parking lot was filling with cars as people arrived for a meeting at that *other* building. They were coming as families mostly—fathers, mothers, and children—carrying their scriptures. They were

---

*Lance B. Wickman was a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given on 17 August 2004 during Campus Education Week.*

more casually dressed than are we customarily in going to church. But they were flocking to a meeting in that other church much as our people flock to meetings in our buildings. As I watched, the thought forcefully impressed itself upon my mind that this is just the way it was in 1820 when a 14-year-old and his family flocked to religious assemblies—looking for something. The impression continued that for these people—as for those in Joseph’s day, as for us—there really *is* more to life than “news, weather, and sports”!

These people in that San Diego parking lot were also searching for something. But what? Many have so searched in vain. Scripture records that

*the days come . . . that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord:*

*And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it.* [Amos 8:11–12]

Even would-be disciples in the very Church of Christ may at times experience periodic “whiteout” conditions in the blizzards of Babylon and not see “the word of the Lord” that is right in front of them. Recall the two on the road to Emmaus, whose “eyes were holden” that they could not recognize the Savior when He “talked with [them] by the way” (Luke 24:16, 32).

And that, my dear brothers and sisters, is where we here in this congregation come in. We are here in this congregation, rather than at the swimming pool or at some seaside resort, because there really is more to life for us than “news, weather, and sports.” We are here in this place today because we don’t want a whiteout; we don’t want an Emmaus road experience. We don’t want to search and not see. We are here because we are looking for “wisdom and great treasures of knowledge,

even hidden treasures.” We are here because—quite literally—we are seeking the *word* of wisdom.

What, then, is the Word of Wisdom? Section 89 of the Doctrine and Covenants is usually regarded by Church members as the setting forth of the Lord’s law of health. Mention Doctrine and Covenants 89 and one immediately thinks, “Word of Wisdom.” Say “Word of Wisdom” and the subject of health quickly comes to mind. For some the word association with section 89 or the Word of Wisdom is even narrower—an abstinence from tea, coffee, tobacco, and alcohol. Of course each of these is important and correct—as far as it goes.

But there is more hidden in the spare syntax of section 89 than a *proscription* of harmful substances or even a *prescription* of a healthy diet. Beyond a mere declaration of principles of a healthy *life* is captured the essence of a *disciple’s lifestyle*—a mind-set, a personal *discipline*—that brings not only “health . . . and marrow to [one’s] bones” but also “wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures” (D&C 89:18–19).

Twice in his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul referred to the body as a temple: “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16). As if for emphasis as well as for clarification, he later asked:

*What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?*

For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s. [1 Corinthians 6:19–20; emphasis added]

We really are not our own. We are the Father’s. And we are the Son’s. The First created us; the Latter saved us—“bought [us] with a price,” to use Paul’s words. These mortal tabernacles of ours are, in this critical phase of

existence, like cars borrowed from the motor pool. We may use them. We may drive them fast or slow, here or there. We may race the engines. We may take them on the freeway. We may even go “off road” if we wish. We can keep them polished and well-tuned—or not. But ultimately each must be returned—temporarily, at least—until “title” is eventually passed to us in the Resurrection. And then—what will we have?

The answer to that question is not in the nature of the tabernacle itself. The Savior has already seen to that. Staying with the automobile metaphor for another moment, there will be no “jalopies” in that great day, no Edsels. Each will be a Rolls Royce, for “all things shall be restored to their proper and perfect frame” (Alma 40:23). No, the answer to the question—What will we have?—is not to be found in the chassis but in the “interior.” The answer is to be found not in the *form* of the *tabernacle* but in the majesty of the *temple* inside.

Hence, in the here and now, wisdom is to be found not just in living a health code but in earnestly seeking to make the mortal tabernacle a temple to the Most High—a by-product of obedience to *all* the commandments. *For the “great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures” to be found are nothing less than the mysteries of godliness.*

“But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding?” (Job 28:12). That is how the ancient Job put it. It is a question for the ages. Wisdom’s acquisition has occupied the attention of poets and prophets. Many have sought it; comparatively few have truly found it. Some have spent years and fortunes in gathering books and other artifacts of knowledge, and yet real wisdom has escaped them. Others—fishermen, shepherds, men of limited education, and a Carpenter—have possessed it.

In a world where illiteracy is in full retreat, where frontiers of knowledge seem to expand at warp speed, and where we are literally

awash in information, why is *wisdom* so elusive? And why is it that the unlearned and unlettered are as likely to possess it—if not more so—as the educated and erudite? Like the prophet Elijah, who found not the Lord in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire, neither is the man of wisdom to be found encrusted with ciphers, bits, and bytes—no matter how voluminously gathered or prestigiously accumulated, and no matter how stunningly retrievable. The Lord has always been revealed by the “still small voice.” And, in the words of the Psalmist, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10).

In biblical parlance, “fear of the Lord” means a profound reverence for Him. So, the honest seeker after wisdom must begin with a reverence for the Lord and be alert to His unique directional equipment.

Almost four decades ago, I was a newly commissioned lieutenant in the United States Army assigned to the U.S. Army Ranger School for qualification in what since has become known as “special operations”—long-range reconnaissance and combat patrols, commando raids, and elite infantry tactics. Several weeks of our training took place in the swamplands of Eglin Air Force Base in the western panhandle of Florida. Much of our training was at night in the swamps. I described that experience in an *Ensign* article as follows:

*The swamp was pitch-black. Inky water, cold in the early spring, crept above our waists to our chests, bringing an incessant shiver. Mangrove trees scratched our faces and hands and pulled at our clothing, and submerged logs seemed to throw themselves in our path. An occasional slough opened under our feet, and suddenly we would be over our heads in the fetid water. Sodden clothing and equipment and heavy weapons seemed to weigh a ton, pulling us down into the murky bog.*

*From somewhere deep in the swamp an alligator bellowed. Deadly water moccasins silently slithered off nearby tree stumps into the water. The blackness*

*of the night and the heaviness of the pungent, stagnant air was like a suffocating blanket. But [we] moved steadily and surely toward our destination, our course clearly pointed by a diminutive device worth at most a few dollars in the marketplace but of immeasurable value to soldiers swallowed up in an alien wilderness—a lensatic compass. . . .*

*. . . Less than a year later I would find myself leading a platoon of infantry in the jungles and rice paddies of Southeast Asia. My experience in Vietnam would attest that of all the skills taught in Ranger School none was more important than the ability to read—and the confidence to follow—that simple little gadget, the compass. Even on the darkest night its luminous dial reliably pointed the route. No matter how hedged up the way, no matter how dangerous and foreboding the surroundings, the compass faithfully led to safety the soldier wise enough to follow its bearings. [Lance B. Wickman, “Of Compasses and Covenants,” *Ensign*, June 1996, 37–38]*

Father Lehi also knew something about the wilderness. In fact, for him life *was* a wilderness—literally. He also knew something of the lifesaving qualities of a reliable compass. The Liahona guided him—its bearings not coming from a magnetic field but rather through a function of “faith and diligence and heed” (1 Nephi 16:28).

But life for Lehi was also a *spiritual* wilderness, a circumstance that created “opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11). This metaphoric “wilderness” and the spiritual orienteering to guide one safely through it is powerfully captured in Lehi’s dream of the tree of life:

*Methought I saw in my dream, a dark and dreary wilderness.*

*And it came to pass that I saw a man, and he was dressed in a white robe; and he came and stood before me.*

*And it came to pass that he spake unto me, and bade me follow him.*

*And it came to pass that as I followed him I beheld myself that I was in a dark and dreary waste.*

*And after I had traveled for the space of many hours in darkness, I began to pray unto the Lord that he would have mercy on me, according to the multitude of his tender mercies.*

*And it came to pass after I had prayed unto the Lord I beheld a large and spacious field.*

*And it came to pass that I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy.*

*And it came to pass that I did go forth and partake of the fruit thereof; and I beheld that it was most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted. Yea, and I beheld that the fruit thereof was white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen.*

*And as I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy. [1 Nephi 8:4–12]*

In his dream, Lehi’s “compass” was the Man in the white robe—the Savior. Notwithstanding the “dark and dreary waste” through which he was called to pass, Lehi’s direction was clear and sure—marked for him by that Man who served as his Compass.

We in our day also desperately need a spiritual compass to point the way across the dark and dreary wastes that constitute the world and its influences through which we and our loved ones must of necessity pass in this mortal sphere.

Job answered his own question—Where is wisdom?—in these words: “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding” (Job 28:28). The answer to that same question—Where is wisdom?—presented by Lehi’s dream is the same. Wisdom and its eternal companion—understanding—come from following the Man in the white robe, even from a *profound reverence* for Him. The key to wisdom, therefore, is in knowing where to find Him and how to follow Him, notwithstanding the “dark and dreary waste[s]” and the “mists of darkness” (1 Nephi 8:7, 12:17; see also 1 Nephi 8:23) so prevalent and so potentially captivating!

We need not dwell long on a review of the mists and the wastes that hedge up our way. They are all too familiar to us all. In a recent address to the J. Reuben Clark Law Society, President Boyd K. Packer offered this compelling description of today's world:

*Paul prophesied word by word and phrase by phrase, describing things exactly as they are now. I will quote from Paul's prophecy and check the words that fit our society:*

*This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.*

*For men shall be lovers of their own selves — Check!*

*covetous — Check!*

*boasters — Check!*

*proud — Check!*

*blasphemers — Check!*

*disobedient to parents — Check! Check!*

*unthankful — Check!*

*unholy — Check!*

*Without natural affection — Check! Check!*

*trucebreakers — Check!*

*false accusers — Check!*

*incontinent — Check!*

*fierce — Check!*

*despisers of those that are good — Check!*

*Traitors — Check!*

*heady — Check!*

*highminded — Check!*

*lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God — Check! Check!*

*Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.*

*For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts,*

*Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

*(2 Timothy 3:1–7; emphasis added)*

[Devotional given to the J. Reuben Clark Law Society at the Conference Center, Salt Lake

City, 28 February 2004; "On the Shoulders of Giants," *Clark Memorandum*, fall 2004, 9]

Television, magazines, pulp novels, the Internet—these comprise a familiar litany of those media influences that thrust before us the vilest lusts and most insidious wiles of the adversary. Enticing and addicting, they cause many to lose their way—even "the very elect," as Jesus said (Matthew 24:24)—much as those seen by Lehi in his dream became lost in "an exceedingly great mist of darkness" (1 Nephi 8:23). Even our very homes are no longer an automatic refuge from such things. It is as though these mists aggressively chase us, like the ancient destroying angel, seeping in through cracks in the doors and the windows, over the transom, and across the threshold. They are before us with the single touch of a remote control button or a computer keystroke.

Like the ancient Israelites, our only protection is in the blood of the Lamb. But we are past the day when we can merely paint the blood of a sheep on our doorposts as protection against the onslaught of this modern destroying angel. Our devotion to the Lamb must be inscribed on the "fleshy tables of the heart" (2 Corinthians 3:3)—an endeavor more easily spoken of than accomplished in today's world.

Ominous is this insightful parenthetical observation about the members of the Church in Helaman's day:

*And in the fifty and first year of the reign of the judges there was peace also, save it were the pride which began to enter into the church—not into the church of God, but into the hearts of the people who professed to belong to the church of God. [Helaman 3:33; emphasis added]*

Mormon seems to be describing an ancient church characterized by concentric circles. The outer circle circumscribed all who *professed membership* in the church; but only a smaller inner circle encompassed those who were

truly “the church of God.” Well might we ask whether such is true today. Are there some of us professing membership but, in a manner of speaking, with one foot in the world and the other on a banana peel? Are there some of us, titillated by worldly enticements, who seek to have both God and Mammon? Are there some of us in our present go-along-get-along culture who have slouched into a casualness about spiritual things? Some of us are like the ancient king of Israel, Jehu, who did much of what the Lord commanded “but . . . took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with *all* his heart: for [we are told] he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam” (2 Kings 10:31; emphasis added).

In such a state, our divine nature can be gradually enveloped and sedated in a creeping asphyxiation by a kind of spiritual carbon monoxide poisoning. We aren’t bad people. We may even regard ourselves as good people. But the hard truth is that the near-invisible poison of our circumstance dulls our sensitivities. Like Lehi’s Liahona, in such a state our spiritual compass will not function. The Man in the white robe becomes “whited out”—obscured from view. Wisdom eludes us.

In that circumstance, we are susceptible to being victimized by what could be called “ersatz” religion—a kind of inferior substitute or imitation for the real thing. Jesus warned of such as a defining characteristic of the latter days:

*Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not.*

*For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. [Matthew 24:23–24]*

Such pretenders have many faces, their ersatz doctrines many names. Some appear on stage in a doctrinal masquerade of sorts, costuming contemporary sociology in a kind of

philosophical cheesecloth labeled “theology.” Some emerge as a preoccupation with a warped perception of a single gospel principle. Some appear as doctrinaire political creeds. Some take the form of pricey seminars, conferences, and “touchy-feely” sensitivity sessions. Some are deceptively packaged at the movie theater—even as the purported story of the Atonement of Christ, but with an R rating! And so it goes. All of them carry a singular label: the philosophies of men mingled with scripture.

To my mind, influenced as it is by defining experiences in a war distant both in time and place, they represent a kind of jungle or swamp where men and women—good people—become lost. To such, ersatz religion becomes an entanglement of false notions—an immersing slough of counterfeit congregations. Fraudulent doctrines and ideas—like venomous snakes—poison and distort true gospel principles.

But a compass is available with a true azimuth back to firm ground! The Man in the white robe is still there to guide across the dark and dreary wastes to the eternal tree of life. Following the compass—the Man in the white robe—*that* is wisdom. **For wisdom is knowing *what we worship and how we worship.***

A most revealing insight is provided in section 93 of the Doctrine and Covenants. The section begins with these words:

*Verily, thus saith the Lord: It shall come to pass that every soul who forsaketh his sins and cometh unto me, and calleth on my name, and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face and know that I am;*

*And that I am the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world;*

*And that I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one. [D&C 93:1–3]*

Jesus Christ is, literally, the Man in the white robe. He is the light, the beacon, the luminescent Compass that enlightens every

soul coming into the world. He is the One who leads us back to the Father—our ultimate destination, the very tree of life—because Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in Him. Jesus is both the Way *and* the Destination. “Coming unto Christ” therefore means, quite literally, safely traversing the dark and dreary wastes of mortality to return safely home to the Father and the Son.

This, of course, is familiar doctrine. The challenge is in the practicalities of knowing *how* to come unto Christ, in knowing *how* to follow Him. The first verse of section 93 that I just read is a good summary of the practicalities: forsaking sin, calling on His name, obeying His voice, and keeping His commandments. But, like a carefully drawn topographic map, section 93 provides even more exacting reference points from which we can obtain our bearings. Quoting John the Revelator, it tells us something about how the mortal Jesus came unto His Father. John tells us, “He received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness” (D&C 93:13). Continuing, he said:

*And I, John, bear record, and lo, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Ghost descended upon him in the form of a dove, and sat upon him, and there came a voice out of heaven saying: This is my beloved Son.*

*And I, John, bear record that he received a fulness of the glory of the Father;*

*And he received all power, both in heaven and on earth, and the glory of the Father was with him, for he dwelt in him. [D&C 93:15–17; emphasis added]*

There was no “free pass” for Jesus in mortality. To ultimately accomplish the great Atonement whereby He descended below all things, He first had to experience mortality as other men do. As Paul put it, “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8).

And so it was that in His early life, before the commencement of His public ministry, He proceeded “from grace to grace”—that is, from one plateau of wisdom and understanding to the next—until at the time of His baptism He “received a fulness of the glory of the Father; . . . for [the Father] dwelt in him.” Jesus was always good; but in His earnest quest to come to know His Father under the conditions applicable in mortality, the doctrines and principles of the gospel distilled “upon [His] soul as the dew from heaven” (D&C 121:45) “here a little and there a little” (2 Nephi 28:30) until at last He reached a fulness.

Why is this important for us to know? Well, for one reason—also quoting Paul: “We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus has been there. He *knows* what we face. But, more, in His very negotiation of the challenges of mortality He *becomes* the compass, the Man in the white robe! He knows the way across the dark and dreary waste because He has already covered that ground! It is familiar territory. Continuing in section 93, the Lord Himself teaches us the ultimate lesson:

*I give unto you these sayings [that is, regarding His own experience in growing from grace to grace] that you may understand and know how to worship, and know what you worship, that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness.*

*For if you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father; therefore, I say unto you, you shall receive grace for grace. [D&C 93:19–20; emphasis added]*

Jesus really is the Compass! Or, to use His own words, He is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). And just as He proceeded from grace to grace, so may we. Understanding

this dynamic process is knowing how and what to worship. And knowing how and what to worship, my dear friends—that is “fear of the Lord.” *That* is reverence for the Lord. *That* is *wisdom!*

Nowhere, in my judgment, is this pivotal truth better illustrated than in a well-known episode from the Book of Mormon. I refer to Alma and Amulek’s mission of recovery among the apostate Zoramites. It was an unusual mission for a number of reasons. One of those reasons was that the Zoramites (or the residents of the city of Zoram) were already acquainted with gospel principles. These were not untutored barbarians like the Lamanites had been when Ammon and his brethren went among them. They were not a people ignorant of the ways of the Lord. Rather, we are told, the Zoramites were a people “*perverting the ways of the Lord*” (Alma 31:1; emphasis added). They were a people who had adopted an ersatz religion—a poor substitute for the genuine article.

At first blush their religion seems bizarre, even ridiculous; but if we reflect for a moment, we are brought to the sobering realization that their substitute religion was not so much different from what we see about us today. It began with a raised platform in the center of their synagogue. On a given day each week, those desiring to worship would go to the synagogue, and each in turn would stand upon the platform reciting the same catechism—a purported “prayer” that was quite self-congratulatory in nature. (For often, what is ersatz religion if not self-promoting?) These apostate Zoramites proclaimed themselves “holy” and “elect.” They rejected the notion of a Christ in favor of a philosophy of predestination. These false doctrines—philosophies of men mingled with scripture—had so invested their minds that they were deep in the swamp of fraudulent persuasions.

Gamely, Alma and his brethren sought to lead them back to high ground, but the more

affluent were not much interested. However, these missionaries began to have some success among the poorer class of people—those not permitted entrance to the synagogues. (Then, as now, affluence tended to be a breeding ground for ersatz religion; the poorer classes seldom have the time, means, or patience for it!) As Alma was teaching one day, a large group of these humbler Zoramites approached him. They had a single question and had appointed a spokesman to pose it to Alma. They asked where they should worship, having been excluded from the synagogues. Alma beheld them “with great joy,” for he perceived that in their humility “they were in a preparation to hear the word” (Alma 32:6).

What follows is one of the greatest sermons ever preached on this dynamic process we call *worship*. It spans multiple chapters in the Book of Mormon and involved a sort of “tag-team” approach between Alma and Amulek. Alma begins by extolling the virtue of genuine humility as the seedbed for faith (which, of course, is the springboard for real worship). Humility, he says, brings repentance, which in turn produces a worshipful mind and heart. Then one must proceed “to an experiment upon [the word]” (Alma 32:27). Likening that experimentation to planting a seed, he says that one’s faith ripens to knowledge as one feels the swelling within the breast as the Holy Ghost attests to the validity of the word. This in turn leads to further experimentation and more swelling until eventually one reaches a perfect knowledge or, in the words of section 93, “receive[s] a fulness of the glory of the Father.”

This dynamic process is what it means to grow from grace to grace. This is what it means to worship. Often we refer to Alma’s discourse as his great lecture on faith. And so it is. But even more profoundly it is his great lecture on *worship*. And there is more.

Citing an ancient prophet about whom we know little—Zenos—Alma teaches that we

don't need to be in a synagogue or church building to worship (although it is important to go there regularly). We can worship by involving ourselves in this dynamic process of worship—or experimentation upon the word—anywhere: in the wilderness, in our fields, in our homes, in our very closets, indeed, in our congregations. In this process we can cry unto the Lord in the midst of our afflictions, and He will be there for us. He is the Man in the white robe; and He will lead us along across the “dark and dreary waste” if we will constantly involve ourselves in experimenting upon His word in an attitude of humility and repentance.

Then Alma sat down and Amulek arose, preaching one of the great sermons of any dispensation on the infinite and eternal Atonement. In effect he teaches that as we fix our attention on the Man in the white robe, who descended below all things as the “great and last sacrifice” (Alma 34:13), we become encircled about “in the arms of safety” (Alma 34:16). Echoing Alma’s counsel, Amulek reiterates the dynamic process of worship and crying unto the Lord in all our places and circumstances. And then he adds this admonition:

*And now behold, my beloved brethren, I say unto you, do not suppose that this is all; for after ye have done all these things, if ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance, if ye have, to those who stand in need—I say unto you, if ye do not any of these things, behold, your prayer is vain, and avail-eth you nothing, and ye are as hypocrites who do deny the faith.*

*Therefore, if ye do not remember to be charitable, ye are as dross, which the refiners do cast out, (it being of no worth) and is trodden under foot of men. [Alma 34:28–29; emphasis added]*

Thus these two great ministers of the gospel lay before us the three Cs—commandments, covenants, and charity—that make up the

dynamic process, a divine dynamic, that is real worship.

Knowing *how* to worship and *what* to worship is the very essence of wisdom, and such wisdom truly unlocks the door to “great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures.” These treasures are what John refers to as “grace.” Hence, proceeding “from grace to grace” is the steady accretion of knowledge of God as it becomes reflected in our countenances and our behavior. The greatest treasure of all—the ultimate treasure—is to eventually come to a fullness of knowledge. And, in the end, is not this Alma’s point in describing the process of experimenting upon the word?

All of which returns us to where we began—a focus upon the word, even upon the *Word of Wisdom*. For we see that in its ultimate expression, the Word of Wisdom is to fully embrace “the Word” Himself—even the divine Compass, the Man in the white robe. Having “health in [the] navel and marrow to [the] bones” and being able to “run and not be weary” or to “walk and not faint”—these are significant blessings to be sure. But they are only transitory—for, in the poet’s lyrical expression:

*Our hearts, though stout and brave,  
Still, like muffled drums, are beating  
Funeral marches to the grave.*

[Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “A Psalm of Life” (1839), stanza 4]

In the end, the only lasting manifestation of embracing the Word of Wisdom—of following the Man in the white robe—is to be found in the “great treasures of knowledge,” the “hidden treasures,” that are the mysteries of godliness and the “fulness of the glory of the Father” and of the Son.

But, for the moment, here we are in this mortal sphere metaphorically described by Lehi as the “dark and dreary waste.” Who knows how many “graces” removed from

our ultimate quest are we! Yet, wandering memory's halls there emerges for me from the reaches of the past another time, another place, another very real "dark and dreary waste" that has become a metaphor within a metaphor, a living reality of the shadows and periodic despairs of mortality enlightened by the beckoning reassurance of the Man in the white robe.

The year was 1966. The place was Vietnam. I was a platoon leader in an infantry battalion. I remember the night as though it were yesterday. Our battalion was attempting to move cross-country deep in enemy-controlled territory using armored personnel carriers. The expedition became a nightmare. The weight of these armored vehicles proved to be too great for the soft crust of the rice paddies. One after another, several of them sank deeply into the ooze. Mine was among them. Because of the high vulnerability to attack in the darkness of the hour, the battalion commander did not want to stop the entire column. So he left me—as the only officer among the numerous stranded vehicles—in command while the rest of the battalion moved on.

I shall never forget the feeling of abject loneliness. The night was literally as black as pitch. The marooned personnel carriers, each with a half-dozen soldiers aboard, were stretched across the alien and forbidding landscape for a quarter of a mile or more like so many small islands in a dark and sinister ocean. Not wanting to telegraph our plight to the enemy, who often were listening to our radio frequency, I determined to move from

one carrier to the next to make personal contact with the men, coordinate our improvised defense, and offer reassurance. It was a dangerous and harrowing experience—a night fraught with an anxiety that even the passage of nearly 40 years has not erased!

But what I remember the most that night is the artillery. Thank heaven for the artillery! At my request the howitzer battery assigned to cover us fired several phosphorescent air bursts—registered concentrations to serve as reference points for artillery support in the event of an attack. As they split the oppressive gloom, those artillery bursts seemed to offer a mathematical, visible umbrella of reassurance that our location was known to our friends, that we would be all right, and that in due course morning would break. The long night dragged on, but, as it always does, dawn eventually came and with it our pathway to safety.

And so it is with us, my dear friends, ourselves at times seemingly marooned in a "dark and dreary waste." Always there is the Word—the Word of Wisdom, our eternal Reference Point, the Man in the white robe, our everlasting Compass—illuminating, reassuring, and beckoning us to those "hidden treasures," even "peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come" (D&C 59:23).

Why are we here today instead of at the beach? We are here because we are truly seeking "wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures." We are here because, in the end, for us there really is more to life than news, weather, and sports. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.