



“Of You It Is Required to Forgive”

*By forgiving others, we free ourselves from the burden
of hatred and prepare ourselves for eternal life.*

From the Life of George Albert Smith

In 1897, while still a young man, George Albert Smith enlisted in the Utah National Guard. At the encouragement of some of his companions, he ran for an elected office in the Guard, but during the weeks leading up to the election, a rival guardsman began spreading false rumors accusing George Albert Smith of unethical practices. As a result, Sergeant Smith lost an election that he felt he should have won. What made the situation more difficult was that the man who spread the false rumors had once been a friend.

Though he tried to brush it off, the offense filled George Albert Smith’s heart with bitterness. He went to church the following Sunday, but he did not feel right about taking the sacrament. He prayed for help and realized that he needed to repent of the resentment he was feeling. He decided to seek out his friend and be reconciled with him.

George Albert Smith went directly to the man’s office and said in a soft voice, “My brother, I want you to forgive me for hating you the way I have for the last few weeks.”

Immediately his friend’s heart softened. “Brother Smith, you have no need for forgiveness,” he said. “It is I who need forgiveness from you.” They shook hands, and thereafter they remained good friends.¹ [See suggestion 1 on page 253.]

A few years later, George Albert Smith made forgiving others one of his lifelong goals when he wrote in his personal creed: “I would not knowingly wound the feeling of any, not even one who may

have wronged me, but would seek to do him good and make him my friend.”²

A close associate of President Smith observed that the ability to forgive was indeed one of his defining attributes: “Truly he forgave all men. He was aware in all of his life of the commandment of God: God will forgive whom he will forgive. As for us, we must forgive all men. He could do that, and then refer the matter to God. As he forgave I am sure he forgot. When one who forgives can forget, then truly that man is an unusual man, indeed a man of God!”³

Teachings of George Albert Smith

If we understand the gospel of Jesus Christ, we are more disposed to forgive others.

There is one thing that we could well strive to cultivate, and that is, the disposition to forgive one another our trespasses. The spirit of forgiveness is a virtue without which we shall never fully realize the blessings we hope to receive.⁴

The people of the world do not understand . . . how the Savior felt when in the agony of his soul, he cried to his Heavenly Father, not to condemn and destroy these who were taking his mortal life, but he said:

“. . . Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34.)

That should be the attitude of all of the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. That should be the attitude of all the sons and daughters of God and would be, it seems to me, if they fully understood the plan of salvation. . . . Anger and hatred in our hearts will not bring us peace and happiness.⁵

The Lord has given us great information, has revealed His mind and will unto us, has taught us things that the world knows not of, and, in accordance with the information we have received, He holds us responsible and expects us to live a higher life, a more ideal life than those who do not as fully comprehend the Gospel as we do. The spirit of forgiveness is something that the Latter-day Saints might with profit exhibit more fully among themselves. . . .

We must get into a condition where we can forgive our brethren.⁶
[See suggestion 2 on page 253.]

**When we forgive others, we show appreciation for the
forgiveness Heavenly Father extends to us.**

In connection with this matter [of forgiving others], I will read a few verses from the eighteenth chapter of St. Matthew, beginning with the twenty-first verse. It seems that the Apostles were with the Master upon this occasion, and Peter came to Him and said:

“Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?”

“Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times but, Until seventy times seven.” [Matthew 18:21–22.]

Then the Savior gave a parable . . . of two men. One of the men owed his lord a large amount of money, and he came to him and told him he could not pay what he owed, and asked that he might be forgiven the debt. The lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and forgave the debt. Straightway this man who had been forgiven went out and found a fellow-servant who owed him a small amount, and he demanded his pay. The poor man was unable to meet the obligation, and he in turn asked that he might be forgiven the debt. But he was not forgiven; on the contrary he was taken and cast into prison by the one who had already been forgiven by his lord. When the other fellow-servants saw what had been done they went to the lord of this man and told him, and he was wroth and delivered the one whom he had forgiven unto torment, until he should pay all that was due. His soul was not big enough to appreciate the mercy shown him, and because of that lack of charity he lost all. [See Matthew 18:23–35.]

At times we find little difficulties arising among us, and we forget the patience our Father in Heaven exercises towards us, and we magnify in our hearts some trivial thing that our brother or sister may have done or said concerning us. We do not always live that law which the Lord desires us to observe in regard to these matters. We forget the commandment He gave to the Apostles in the words of the prayer, wherein they were told to pray that they might be

forgiven their debts even as they forgive their debtors [see Matthew 6:12]. I feel that we have to learn a great deal in this regard. We have not complied as completely as we should with the requirements of our Heavenly Father.⁷ [See suggestion 3 on page 253.]

**By choosing not to take offense, we can purge
from our hearts all feelings of unkindness.**

We have been taught to love our enemies, and to pray for those who despitefully use us and speak evil of us [see Matthew 5:44]. . . . When you are reviled, do not revile again. When others speak evil of you, pity them, and pray for them. Remember the example of the Divine Master, who, when suspended upon the cruel tree, said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."⁸

Sometimes a brother in authority has offended, in some way, one of the members of the Church, probably unknown to himself, and that child of our Father's silently continues to feel hurt, instead of doing as the Lord has commanded, going to the offending man and stating to him, in kindness, the feelings of his heart, and giving that brother an opportunity to say to him, "I am sorry I have offended you, and I desire that you shall forgive me." The result is that, in some instances, we find a resentful feeling existing that has been instigated by Satan.⁹ [See suggestion 4 on page 253.]

We have no hard feelings toward any of our fellowmen; we have no occasion to. If they misunderstand us, misquote us, and persecute us, we should remember they are in the hands of the Lord. . . . So when we partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, . . . let us purge from our hearts all feeling of unkindness toward one another and toward our brothers and sisters who are not of our faith.¹⁰

**By forgiving others, we prepare ourselves
for the celestial kingdom.**

Let each of us live in such a way that the adversary will have no power over us. If you have any differences one with another, if there have been any disagreements between yourself and your neighbors, settle them just as soon as you possibly can, under the influence of the Spirit of the Lord, in order that when the time comes both



“If there have been any disagreements between yourself and your neighbors, settle them just as soon as you possibly can, under the influence of the Spirit of the Lord.”

you and your descendants who may be following after you may be prepared to receive an inheritance in the celestial kingdom.¹¹

In the Book of Doctrine and Covenants we find a reference made to this matter of forgiveness, wherein the Lord gives a commandment; it is contained in the sixty-fourth section, and refers to us in this day. It reads as follows:

“. . . Verily I say unto you, I, the Lord, forgive sins unto those who confess their sins before me and ask forgiveness, who have not sinned unto death.

“My disciples, in days of old, sought occasion against one another, and forgave not one another in their hearts, and for this evil they were afflicted, and sorely chastened.

“Wherefore I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another, for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses, standeth condemned before the Lord, for there remaineth in him the greater sin.”

The verse last read is the one I would emphasize.

“I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men;

“And ye ought to say in your hearts, let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee according to thy deeds.” [D&C 64:7–11.]

If our lives were such that, when we differ with our neighbor, if, instead of setting ourselves up as judges one against another, we could honestly and conscientiously appeal to our Father in Heaven and say, “Lord, judge between me and my brother; thou knowest my heart; Thou knowest I have no feeling of anger against him; help us to see alike, and give us wisdom that we may deal righteously with each other,” how few differences there would be, and what joy and blessings would come to us! But, little difficulties arise from time to time which disturb the equilibrium of our daily lives, and we continue to be unhappy because we cherish an improper influence, and have not charity. . . .

. . . “Now I speak unto you concerning your families; if men will smite you, or your families, once, and ye bear it patiently and revile not against them, neither seek revenge, ye shall be rewarded;

“But if ye bear it not patiently, it shall be accounted unto you as being meted out a just measure unto you.” [D&C 98:23–24.]

This is also the word of the Master unto us. If we live according to this law, we will grow in grace and strength day by day, and in favor with our Heavenly Father. Faith will increase in the hearts of our children. They will love us for the uprightness and integrity of our lives, and they will rejoice that they have been born of such parents. I say to you that this commandment is not given in an idle way; for the Lord has declared that He does not give any law indifferently, but every law is given that it may be kept and lived up to by us.

We will be in this world only a short time. The youngest and strongest of us are simply preparing for the other life, and before we get into the glory of our Father and enjoy the blessings that we hope to receive through faithfulness, we will have to live the laws of patience, and exercise forgiveness toward those who trespass against us, and remove from our hearts all feelings of hatred toward them.

“And again, if your enemy shall smite you the second time, and you revile not against your enemy, and bear it patiently, your reward shall be an hundredfold.

“And again, if he shall smite you the third time, and ye bear it patiently, your reward shall be doubled unto you four fold.” [D&C 98:25–26.] . . .

May we have the Spirit of the Master dwelling within us, that we may forgive all men as He has commanded, forgive, not only with our lips but in the very depths of our hearts, every trespass that may have been committed against us. If we do this through life, the blessings of the Lord will abide in our hearts and our homes.¹² [See suggestion 5 below.]

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Consider these ideas as you study the chapter or as you prepare to teach. For additional help, see pages v–vii.

1. Ponder the story on page 247 and read 3 Nephi 12:22–24. Why do you think the Lord requires that we be reconciled with our brothers and sisters before we can come unto Him?
2. On pages 248–49 President Smith explains that our knowledge of the plan of salvation should help us be more forgiving. Why do you think this is so? How do we “get into a condition” (page 249) in which we can forgive others?
3. As you study the section that begins on page 249, think of a time when Heavenly Father forgave you. Why do you think failing to forgive others would make us unworthy of the forgiveness we seek?
4. Read the second full paragraph on page 250. What hinders us from being reconciled with a Church leader or someone else who has knowing or unknowingly offended us? What can we do to overcome these difficulties?
5. Review the last section of teachings (pages 250). How does our willingness to forgive prepare us for the celestial kingdom? In what ways are our families blessed when we forgive others?

Related Scriptures: Matthew 5:23–24, 38–48; 6:12, 14–15; 7:1–5; 18:15; 1 Nephi 7:16–21; Doctrine and Covenants 42:88

Teaching help: “When an individual asks a question, consider inviting others to answer it instead of answering it yourself. For example, you could say, “That’s an interesting question. What do the rest of you think?” or ‘Can anyone help with this question?’” (*Teaching, No Greater Call*, 64).

Notes

1. See Merlo J. Pusey, “The Inner Strength of a Leader,” *Instructor*, June 1965, 232.
2. “President George Albert Smith’s Creed,” *Improvement Era*, Apr. 1950, 262.
3. Matthew Cowley, in Conference Report, Apr. 1951, 167.
4. “The Spirit of Forgiveness,” *Improvement Era*, Aug. 1945, 443.
5. In Conference Report, Oct. 1945, 169.
6. In Conference Report, Oct. 1905, 27.
7. In Conference Report, Oct. 1905, 27.
8. In Conference Report, Oct. 1904, 65–66.
9. In Conference Report, Oct. 1905, 27.
10. In Conference Report, Oct. 1906, 50.
11. Address given at Mexican mission conference, May 26, 1946, George Albert Smith Family Papers, University of Utah, box 121, page 288.
12. In Conference Report, Oct. 1905, 27–28, 30.