

LIFE'S A PLAY

THE PLAN OF SALVATION
IN THREE ACTS

*We're in the middle of
a three-act play that
we don't fully understand,
but focusing on Christ
will help us find
an eternally happy ending.*

By Margaret Willden

The lights dim. The plush red curtain rises. The costumed figures around you spring into action. Who is the hero? Who is the villain? It's hard to say.

You stand center stage, unable to make sense of it all. Everyone seems to understand what's going on but you. "This is act 2," one actor whispers. "Look over this script."

We may not all be actors, but the notion of such a play is not that far from reality. Imagine the plan of salvation, also called "the great plan of happiness" (Alma 42:8), as a three-act play. Act 1 is where we came from, act 2 is our life on earth, and act 3 is where we are going. During act 2, we have no memory of our past and little knowledge of our future, but fortunately the gospel of Jesus Christ—the play's script—puts our mortal life in context.

Act 1: Understanding Our Beginnings

From the scriptures and the words of living prophets, we learn of our premortal existence (see Abraham 3:22–24). Before we came to earth, we participated in a council with our Heavenly Father. We learned that we would come to earth to gain a body, have posterity, face opposition, and increase in light and truth. If we were obedient and became more Christlike, we could one day live with our Father again.

Because we would make mistakes along the way, Jesus Christ was chosen as our Savior to pay the price of sin. He suffered for each of us, and because of His sacrifice, we can be cleansed through repentance.

But Satan (or Lucifer, as he was called in the premortal existence) rebelled and sought to remove our ability to choose right or wrong. A War in Heaven began. Upon his defeat, Satan was cast out of heaven, along with the spirits who chose to follow him (see Moses 4:1–4).

Though we can't remember this premortal existence, we know that we promised to do all we could to return to God's presence once we were on earth. And He promised us agency, allowing us to choose to follow Him.

Act 2: Using Our Agency

Now we are here in act 2, and God has provided the script to guide us back to Him—the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our challenge is to use our agency to follow the script so we can prepare to return to our Heavenly Father (see Abraham 3:25). Like a complex play full of subplots, our mortal life can be complicated. It is riddled with temptations, trials, and tragedies of every kind. But the truth is that act 2 is all about choosing whether we will follow the teachings of Christ so we can become more like Him.

The scriptures provide the perfect pattern for happiness, encouraging us to "press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end" (2 Nephi 31:20). We grow as we make and keep covenants, obey the commandments, and repent when we sin. As we immerse ourselves in the scriptures and teachings of our prophets, we will stay focused on the plan we joyfully agreed to follow in act 1.

Act 3: Embracing Eternity

Our physical bodies may die at the end of act 2, but the story doesn't end there. In fact, act 3 has no closing curtain—it is eternal (see Abraham 3:26).

Because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, all of God's children who come to earth will be resurrected. What could be more joyful than resurrection? (see D&C 93:33).

Nearly all will also receive a degree of glory depending on their works: the telestial kingdom, with a glory like that of the stars; the terrestrial kingdom, with a glory like that of the moon; or the celestial kingdom, with the ultimate glory like that of the sun (see D&C 76:50–113). In the celestial kingdom we will dwell with the Father and the Son. A relative few will remain "filthy still" (2 Nephi 9:16) and be cast into outer darkness, where they can never progress.

What Will Your Story Be?

If we follow the gospel of Jesus Christ in act 2, act 3 of our play will be glorious beyond belief. The curtains are up. The action is underway. What will you do on stage? ■
The author lives in New York, USA.

This idea is based on a talk, "The Play and the Plan," given by President Boyd K. Packer (1924–2015), President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, in a Church Educational System fireside for young adults on May 7, 1995.