

The Master Bridge Builder

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Many years ago I read a book titled *The Way to the Western Sea* by David S. Lavender. It provides a fascinating account of the epic journey of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark as they led their famed expedition across the North American continent to discover an overland route to the Pacific Ocean.

Their trek was a nightmare of back-breaking toil, deep gorges which had to be crossed, and extensive travel by foot, carrying with them their supply-laden boats to find the next stream on which to make their way.

As I read of their experiences, I frequently mused, “If only there were modern bridges to span the gorges or the raging waters.” There came to my mind thoughts of magnificent bridges of our time which accomplish this task with ease: beautiful Golden Gate Bridge of San Francisco fame; sturdy Sydney, Australia, Harbour Bridge; and others in many lands.

In reality, we are all travelers—even explorers of mortality. We do not have the benefit of previous personal experience. We must pass over steep precipices and turbulent waters in our own journey here on earth.

Perhaps such a somber thought inspired

the poet Will Allen Dromgoole’s classic poem titled “The Bridge Builder”:

*An old man, going a lone highway,
Came at the evening, cold and gray,
To a chasm, vast and deep and wide,
Through which was flowing a sullen tide.
The old man crossed in the twilight dim;
The sullen stream had no fears for him;
But he turned when safe on the other side
And built a bridge to span the tide.
“Old man,” said a fellow pilgrim near,
“You are wasting strength with building
here;
Your journey will end with the ending day;
You never again must pass this way;
You have crossed the chasm, deep and
wide—
Why build you the bridge at the eventide?”
The builder lifted his old gray head:
“Good friend, in the path I have come,”
he said,
“There followeth after me today
A youth whose feet must pass this way.
This chasm that has been naught to me
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be.
He, too, must cross in the twilight dim;
Good friend, I am building the bridge
for him.”¹*



Jesus Christ was the supreme architect and builder of bridges for you, for me, for all humankind. He has built the bridges over which we must cross if we are to reach our heavenly home.

Jesus was an unfailing example of personal obedience as He kept the commandments of His Father. Tempted in the wilderness after His long fast, He replied, “Get thee hence, Satan.”

The message of the poem has prompted my thinking and comforted my soul, for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was the supreme architect and builder of bridges for you, for me, for all humankind. He has built the bridges over which we must cross if we are to reach our heavenly home.

The Savior’s mission was foretold. Matthew recorded, “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.”²

There followed the miracle of His birth and the gathering of the shepherds who came with haste to that stable, to that mother, to that child. Even the Wise Men, journeying from the East, followed that star and bestowed their precious gifts upon the young child.

The scripture records that Jesus “grew, and

waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him”³ and that He “went about doing good.”⁴

Bridges the Savior Built

What personal bridges did He build and cross here in mortality, showing us the way to follow? He knew mortality would be filled with dangers and difficulties. He declared:

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”⁵

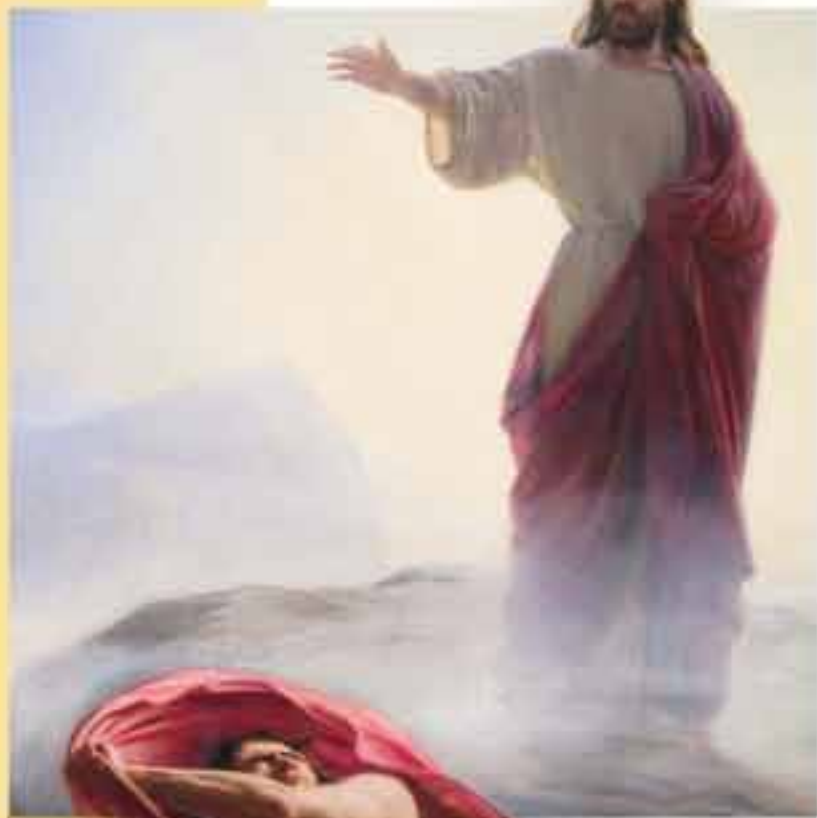
Jesus provided the **bridge of obedience**. He was an unfailing example of personal obedience as He kept the commandments of His Father.

When He was led of the Spirit into the wilderness, He was weak from fasting. Satan was at his seductive best in the offerings he proffered. His first was to satisfy the Savior’s physical needs, including His hunger. To this the Savior replied, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”⁶

Next Satan offered power. Responded the Savior, “It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”⁷

Finally the Savior was offered wealth and earthly glory. His response: “Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”⁸

The Apostle Paul was inspired of the Lord to declare for our time, as well as for his: “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted



above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”⁹

Lest we equivocate, I mention something Ted Koppel, TV news journalist, said in a university commencement address: “What Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai were not the Ten Suggestions. They are commandments.”¹⁰

A bit of humor is found in an account of a conversation between author Mark Twain and a friend. Said the wealthy friend to Twain, “Before I die, I plan to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. I will climb to the top of Mount Sinai and read the Ten Commandments aloud.”

Replied Twain, “Why don’t you stay home and keep them?”

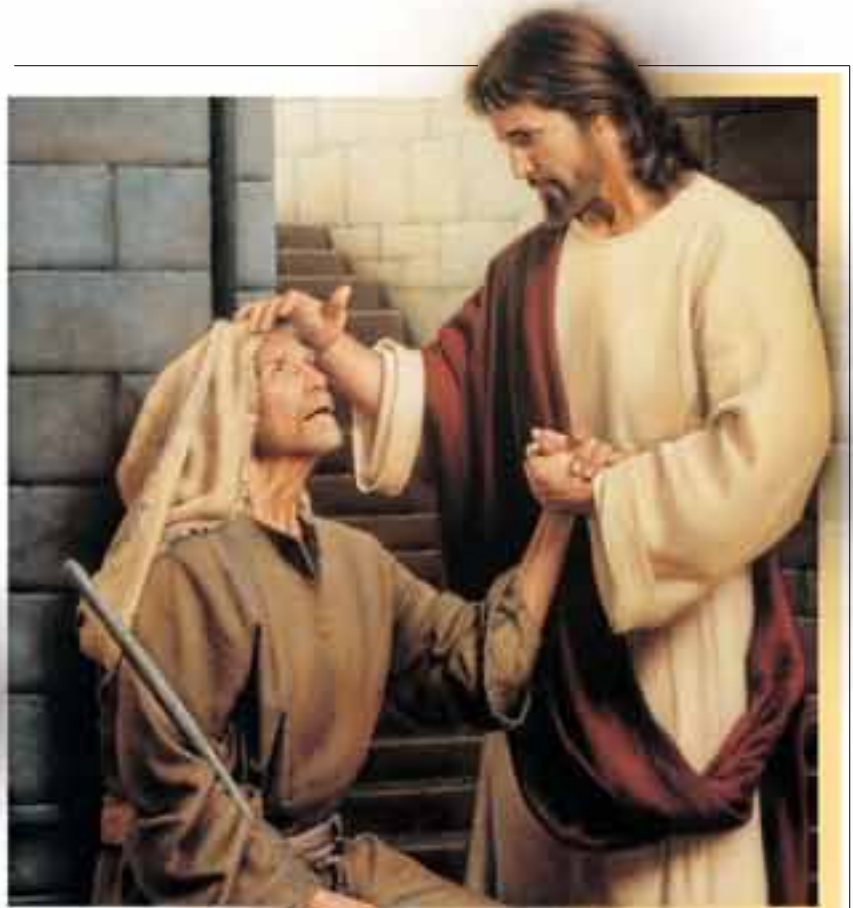
The second bridge provided by the Master for us to cross is the **bridge of service**. We look to the Savior as our example of service. Although He came to earth as the Son of God, He humbly served those around Him. He came forth from heaven to live on earth as mortal man and to establish the kingdom of God. His glorious gospel reshaped the thinking of the world. He blessed the sick; He caused the lame to walk, the blind to see, the deaf to hear. He even raised the dead to life.

In Matthew 25, the Savior tells us this concerning the faithful who will be on His right hand at His triumphal return:

“Then shall the King say unto them . . . , Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

“For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

“Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.



“Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

“When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

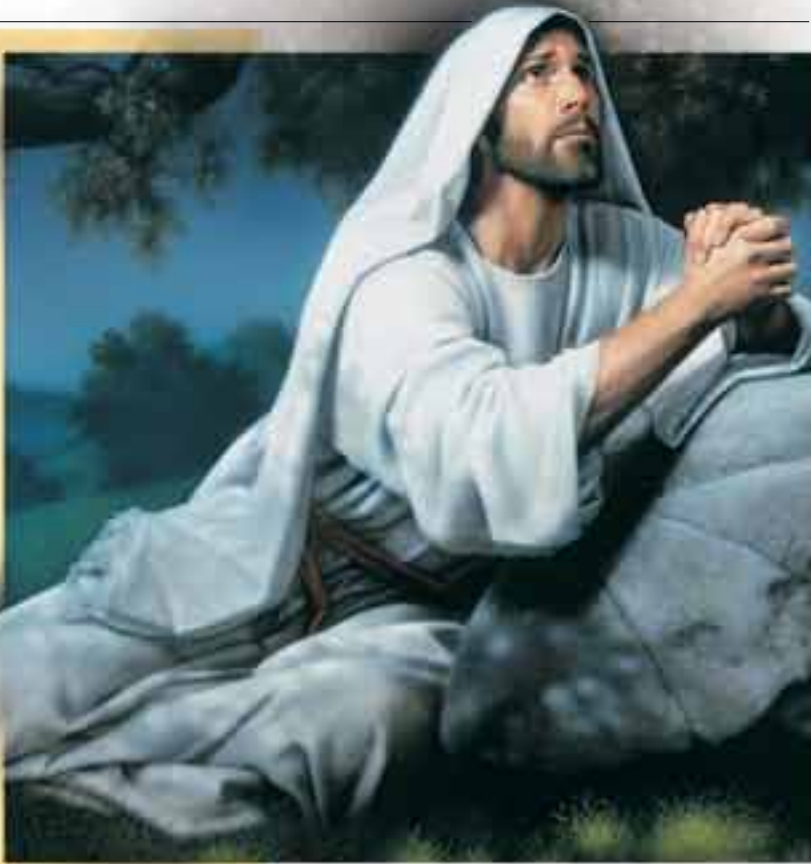
“Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

“And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”¹¹

Elder Richard L. Evans (1906–71) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles once counseled, “We can’t do everything for everyone everywhere, but we can do something for someone somewhere.”¹²

May I share with you an account of an opportunity of service which came to me unexpectedly and in an unusual manner. I received a telephone call from a granddaughter of an old friend. She asked, “Do you remember Francis Brems, who was your Sunday School teacher?” I told her that I did.

We look to the Savior as our example of service. Although He came to earth as the Son of God, He humbly served those around Him.



He did for us what we could not do for ourselves; hence, humankind can cross the bridges He built—into life eternal.

She continued, “He is now 105 years of age. He lives in a small care center but meets with the entire family each Sunday, where he delivers a Sunday School lesson. Last Sunday Grandpa announced to us, ‘My dears, I am going to die this week. Will you please call Tommy Monson and tell him this. He’ll know what to do.’”

I visited Brother Brems the very next evening. I could not speak to him, for he was deaf. I could not write a message for him to read, for he was blind. What was I to do? I was told that his family communicated with him by taking the finger of his right hand and then tracing on the palm of his left hand the name of the person visiting and then any message. I followed the procedure and took his finger and spelled on the palm of his hand T-O-M-M-Y M-O-N-S-O-N. Brother Brems became excited and, taking my hands, placed them on his head. I knew his desire was to receive a priesthood blessing. The driver who had taken me to the care center joined me as we placed our hands on the head of Brother

Brems and provided the desired blessing.

Afterward tears streamed from his sightless eyes. He grasped our hands, and we read the movement of his lips. The message: “Thank you so much.”

Within that very week, just as Brother Brems had predicted, he passed away. I received the telephone call and then met with the family as funeral arrangements were made. How thankful I am that a response to render service was not delayed.

The bridge of service invites us to cross over it frequently.

Finally, the Lord provided us the **bridge of prayer**. He directed, “Pray always, and I will pour out my Spirit upon you, and great shall be your blessing.”¹³

I share with you an account described in a mother’s letter to me relating to prayer. She wrote:

“Sometimes I wonder if I make a difference in my children’s lives. Especially as a single mother working two jobs to make ends meet, I sometimes come home to confusion, but I never give up hope.

“My children and I were watching a television broadcast of general conference, and you were speaking about prayer. My son made the statement, ‘Mother, you’ve already taught us that.’ I said, ‘What do you mean?’ And he replied, ‘Well, you’ve taught us to pray and showed us how, but the other night I came to your room to ask something and found you on your knees praying to Heavenly Father. If He’s important to you, He’ll be important to me.’”

The letter concluded, “I guess you never know what kind of influence you’ll be until a child observes you doing yourself what you have tried to teach him to do.”

The Master's Example

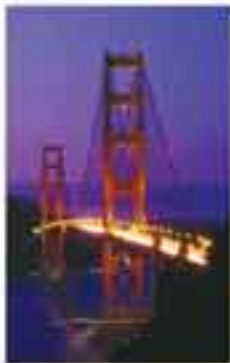
No relating of a prayer touches me so deeply as the prayer offered by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. I believe Luke describes it best:

“He . . . went . . . to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him.

“And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation.

“And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed,

“Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.



IDEAS FOR HOME TEACHERS

After prayerfully studying this message, share it using a method that encourages the participation of those you teach. Following are some examples:

1. Provide paper and writing utensils for family members, and have them

draw a bridge. Briefly introduce each bridge in the article by sharing selected counsel from President Monson. As each bridge is identified, invite family members to write above their drawings ways they can cross the bridge. You might also ask them, “What dangers and difficulties do these bridges help us overcome?” Encourage them to write answers to this question below their drawings.

2. Consider bringing an item or picture that represents each of the bridges spoken of in the article. Share a thought from President Monson about each bridge, and bear your testimony of how each has blessed your life.

3. Read aloud the poem quoted in the article. You could ask family members to share what they can do to build bridges for others. Conclude by listing the three bridges the Lord built for us and how these can help us in our daily lives.

“And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.

“And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”¹⁴

In due time came the trek to the cross. What suffering He endured as He made His burdensome way, carrying His own cross. Heard were the words He uttered upon the cross: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”¹⁵

At length Jesus declared, “It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.”¹⁶

These events, coupled with His glorious Resurrection, completed the final bridge of our trilogy: the bridge of obedience, the bridge of service, the bridge of prayer.

Jesus, the Bridge Builder, spanned that vast chasm we call death. “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”¹⁷ He did for us what we could not do for ourselves; hence, humankind can cross the bridges He built—into life eternal.

I close by paraphrasing the poem “The Bridge Builder”:

*“You have crossed the chasm, deep and wide—
Why build you the bridge at the eventide?”
“There followeth after me today
A vast throng whose feet must pass this way.
This chasm that has been naught to me
To that great throng may a pitfall be.
They too must cross in the twilight dim;
Good friend, I am building the bridge for them.”*

I pray that we may have the wisdom and determination to cross the bridges the Savior built for each of us. ■

NOTES

1. In James Dalton Morrison, ed., *Masterpieces of Religious Verse* (1948), 342.
2. Matthew 1:21.
3. Luke 2:40.
4. Acts 10:38.
5. Matthew 11:28–30.
6. Matthew 4:4.
7. Matthew 4:7.
8. Matthew 4:10.
9. 1 Corinthians 10:13.
10. Duke University commencement speech, May 10, 1987.
11. Matthew 25:34–40.
12. *Richard Evans' Quote Book* (1971), 51.
13. D&C 19:38.
14. Luke 22:39–44.
15. Luke 23:34.
16. John 19:30.
17. 1 Corinthians 15:22.