

Coming unto Christ

BY ELDER HENRY B. EYRING
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

After all you can do, after all your effort, you need confidence that the Atonement is working for you and on you.



The pull upward is far beyond what you would call a desire for self-improvement. When I felt it, I knew I was being urged to live so far above myself that I could never do it on my own.

One of my early memories is reading the scriptures in a schoolroom. The law of the land did not yet forbid it, so the Princeton, New Jersey, public schools began each school day with a standard ritual. I can't remember the sequence, but I remember the content. In our classroom, we pledged allegiance to the flag—in unison, standing, hand over heart. One student, a different one each school day, read verses he or she had chosen from the Bible, and then we recited aloud together the Lord's Prayer.

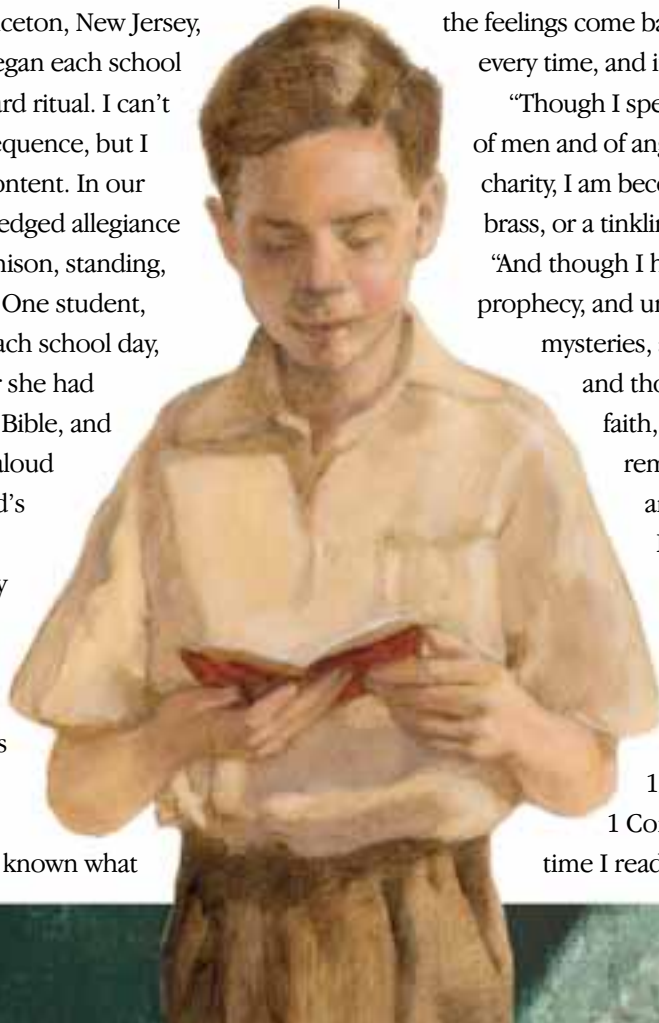
So about every 25 school days, my turn came to choose the scripture. I always chose the same one, so my classmates must have known what

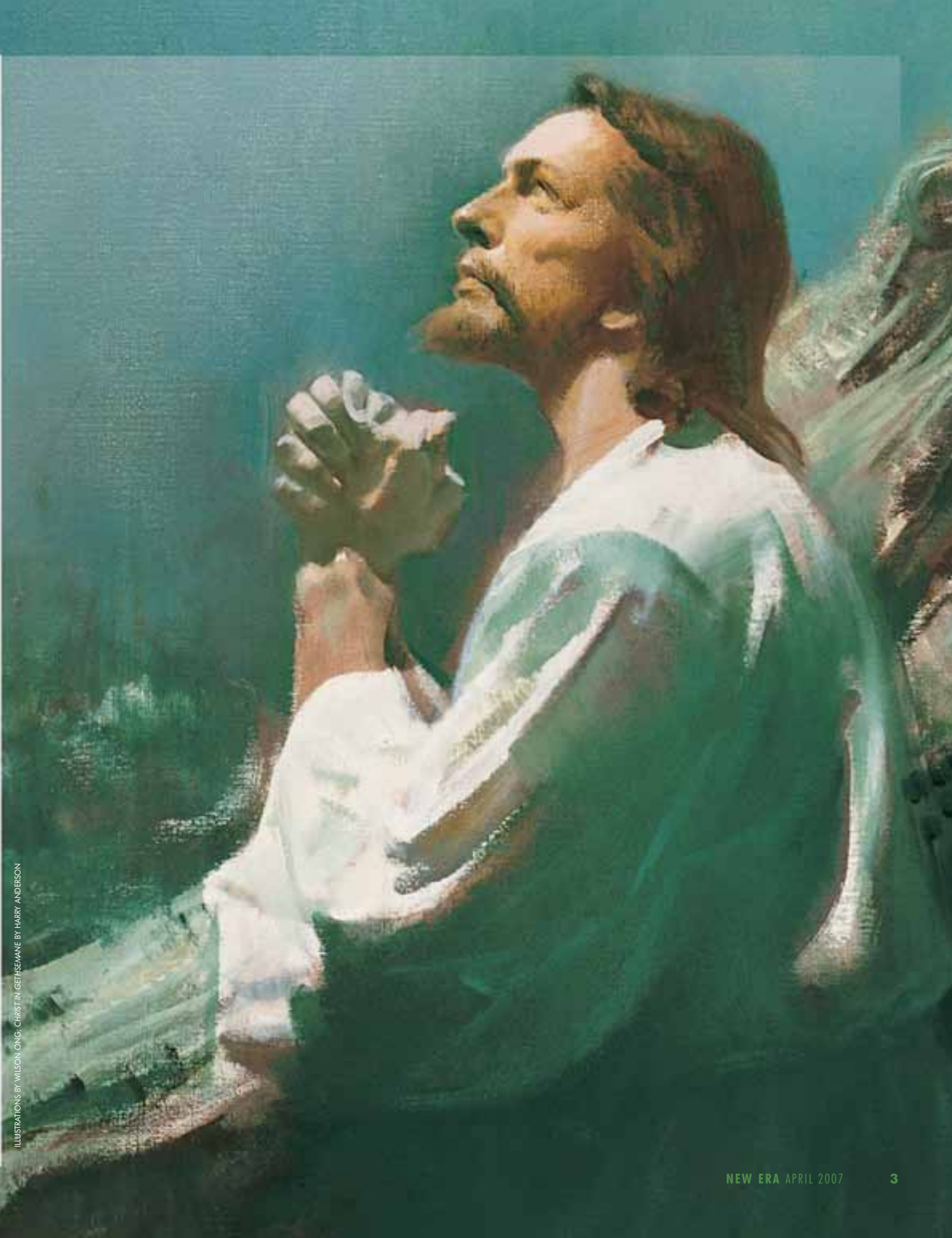
was coming when it was my day. I don't remember when I first heard the words, but I can recite them to you now, and with them the feelings come back. It happened every time, and it still does:

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

“And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing”
(1 Corinthians 13:12).

You remember the rest, through the 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians. By the time I read the first few





ILLUSTRATIONS BY WILSON ONG; CHRISTIN GETSEMANE BY HARRY ANDERSON

words, the feeling would come back. The feeling was not just that the words were true, but that they were about some better world I wanted with all my heart to live in. For me, the feeling was even more specific, and I knew it did not come from within me. It was that there would or could be some better life, and that it would be in a family I would someday have. In that then-distant future, I would be able to live with people in some better, kinder way, beyond even the best and the kindest world I had known as a boy.

Now, little boys don't talk about such things, not to anyone. You might confide in someone that you wanted to play big league baseball someday. But you wouldn't say that you knew someday you'd have a home where you would feel the way you felt when you heard the 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians. So I never talked with anyone about those feelings.

When I was 11, my parents dropped me off at the Salt Lake City home of my great uncle Gaskell Romney. He was a patriarch, and, because he was my father's uncle, he could give me, a boy from the mission field, a patriarchal blessing. I don't think he even sat down to visit with me. He didn't know me except as my father's son. He just led me through the house to a room where a recording device was on a table. He sat me down facing a fireplace, put his hands on my head, and began to give first my lineage and then a blessing.

He began to tell me about the home in which I would someday be the father. That's when I opened my eyes. I know the stones in the fireplace were there because I began to stare at them. I wondered, "How can this man know what is only in my heart?" He described in concrete detail what had been only a yearning, but I could recognize it. It was the desire of my heart, that future home and family that I thought was secret. But it was not secret, because God knew.

Now your impressions will not have been quite like mine, but you have felt a tug, maybe many tugs, to be someone better. And what sets those yearnings apart from

all your daydreams is that they were not about being richer, or smarter, or more attractive, but about being better. I am sure you have had such moments, not just from my experience, but because of what President David O. McKay once said. Listen very carefully:

"Man is a spiritual being, a soul, and at some period of his life everyone is possessed with an irresistible desire to know his relationship to the Infinite. . . . There is something within him which urges him to rise above himself, to control his environment, to master the body and all things physical and live in a higher and more beautiful world" (*True to the Faith: From the Sermons and Discourses of David O. McKay*, comp. Llewelyn R. McKay [1966], 244).

That pull upward is far beyond what you would call a desire for self-improvement. When I felt it, I knew I was being urged to live so far above myself that I could never do it on my own. President McKay had it right. You feel an urging to rise above your natural self. What you have felt is an urging from your Heavenly Father to accept this invitation:

"Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness;

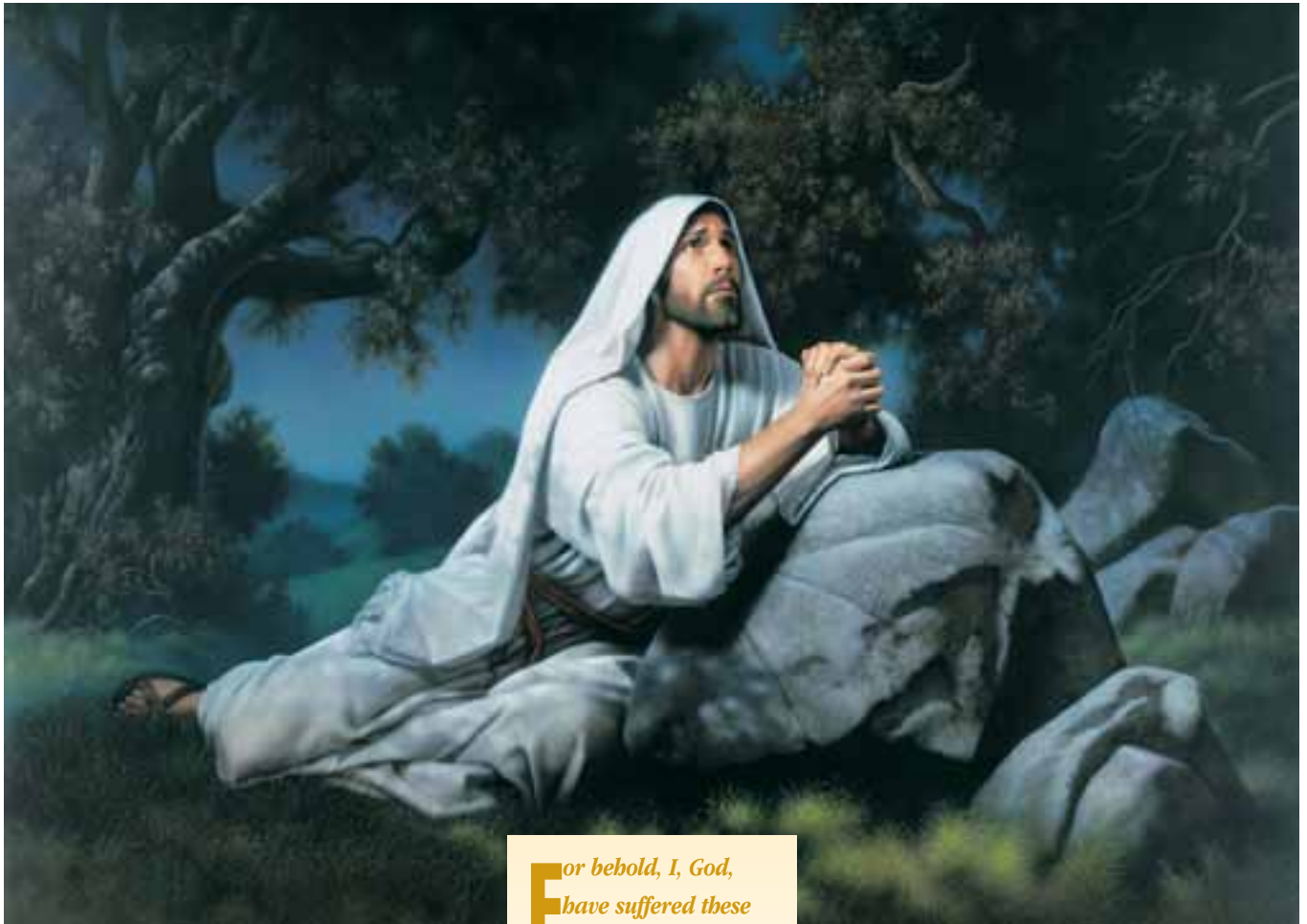
and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.

"And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot" (Moroni 10:32-33).

That urge to rise above yourself is a recognition of your need for the Atonement to work in your life, and your need to be sure that it is working. After all you can do, after all your effort, you need confidence that the Atonement is working for you and on you.



My great uncle,
the patriarch,
set me down, put
his hands on my head,
and began to give
first my lineage and
then a blessing.



For behold, I, God,
 have suffered these
 things for all, that
 they might not suffer if
 they would repent; But
 if they would not repent
 they must suffer even as I.

Something Better Drawing Us Up

You may feel that upward pull. I did one afternoon when I came to understand, as I hadn't before, how much I need the Atonement, what I could do to make it work in my life, and what evidence I could have that it was working.

It was the hour of a devotional at BYU–Idaho. I wasn't the speaker; I was sitting there, just behind and to the right of the speaker. I've still got the book that I held that day. It still has the words in the margins that I wrote then.

In my memory, the room that afternoon was almost as light as the sunshine and as warm. The speaker was Elder A. Theodore Tuttle. I suppose there was a spotlight on his face. Stages always seem light when you're on them. But the brightness was in more than what I saw. It was inside me that day. I think it happened because I walked into that room with the yearning President McKay says will come to everyone. And for me that day it was irresistible; I was in the right place with the right preparation.

I had been trying hard, and yet I wanted to know: "Isn't

there something more I can do?" And Elder Tuttle told me there was and that I would need the Atonement of Jesus Christ working in my life to go where I wanted to go. Elder Tuttle said he had taken a trip to South

America on assignment with Joseph Fielding Smith, then a member of the Council of the Twelve. That was in the days when you went to South America by ship. Elder Smith could have used the time to rest. And he could have let Elder Tuttle rest. But he didn't. He organized daily scripture study, sitting on the deck in those wooden slat chairs most of you have only seen in old movies. They read their scriptures together, and they discussed them, and they marked them. And so what I have written on this page, in the margins, was written by Elder Tuttle in his Doctrine and Covenants on the ship's deck as Elder Smith taught it to him. I can only imagine who passed it to Elder Smith. And now I'm passing it on to you.

I will give you the few scriptures that have made the most difference—all the difference for me—in knowing

how to reach for that something better you and I sometimes feel drawing us up.

The first is not in the margin but is from the 19th section of the Doctrine and Covenants. On the bottom, in capital letters, is written: REPENTANCE. And then an arrow leads to a notation that reads: “Greek word. To have a new mind.” I heard it that day with new meaning.

“Therefore I command you to repent—repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and your sufferings be sore—how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not.

“For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent;

“But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I” (vv. 15–17).

As he read those words that day, I felt the overwhelming suffering of the Savior. And then two things dawned on me. First, if I could not repent to qualify for His Atonement for my sins, I must suffer to the limit of my power to suffer. And, second, with all the requisite suffering of my own, with all I could bear, it would still not be enough. I would still be forever shut out of the only place where there will be the warmth of family, the family of my Heavenly Father whom I have loved and whom I miss, and that of my family here. Somehow I had gotten the idea that the choice was between repenting or not. And then I realized that whatever pain repentance might bring in this life, it was certainly no more than the pain I would face if I did not repent here, and yet that later pain could not lift me home. It could not bring the mercy I needed.

A determination flowed into me both to stay as far as I could from sin and to gain a confidence that my sins were being remitted. In that moment, the penalty for taking chances with sin or with forgiveness loomed larger than I had ever imagined it could. I wanted with all my heart to know both that the Atonement was curing the effects of sin in me and that I was being strengthened against future sin. I wanted

confidence whereas before I had been content with hope.

What I wanted, then, was to know what I could do to gain assurance that I was on the path home. Specific steps to assure that the Atonement is at work in your life will not always be the same. For some, at one point, it would be to see a bishop, a judge in Israel, to confess serious sin and to seek help. For another, it would be to accept baptism. But for everyone, at every stage of purification, there are constants. One is this: reception of the Holy Ghost is the cleansing agent as the Atonement purifies you.



wanted with all my heart to know both that the Atonement was curing the effects of sin in me and that I was being strengthened against future sin.

Protection against Sin

The effects of the Atonement—the lack of pride, of envy, of malice—are a shield against temptation. The Savior taught:

“Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you whom I love, and whom I love I also chasten that their sins may be forgiven, for with the chastisement I prepare a way for their deliverance in all things out of temptation, and I have loved you” (D&C 95:1).

I bear you my testimony that God loves you and that he has prepared a way for your deliverance in all things out of temptation. I bear you my testimony that the broken heart

and contrite spirit that are the requirements for forgiveness are also its fruits. The very humility that is the sign of having been forgiven is protection against future sin. And it is by avoiding future sin that we retain a remission of the sins of the past.

You may not know when you have been fully baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, but you can know you are inviting His presence. And you know when you are making His presence impossible. Although you may be determined to serve the Savior and thus invite the Spirit, some of you will be tempted by some thought like this: “Look, as long as you don’t commit great sin, repentance isn’t that hard. You just confess, take a little embarrassment, and you are clean again.” That is a lie in at least two ways.

First, I have never forgotten the voice of Elder Tuttle after he read this description of suffering for sin from section 19

of the Doctrine and Covenants:

“Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink” (v. 18).

It was about there where I wrote these words: “Teach the people repentance hurts.” I bear you my testimony that you must never believe the lie that there is no pain from sin. You can be forgiven. The Atonement is real. True faith in the Atonement of Jesus Christ, rather than leading you to try a little sin, will lead you to stay as far away from it as you can.

That brings me to a second falsehood. It is this: as the world grows more wicked, it is only reasonable to expect to be overcome by temptation. That is not true either. We do not face so bleak a prospect. Here is what President George Albert Smith taught. He said it more than 50 years ago, but it is still true in our time, and will be in the future, however dark it becomes. He said: “There are two influences ever present in the world. One is constructive and elevating and comes from our Heavenly Father; the other is destructive and debasing and comes from Lucifer. We have our agency and make our own choice in life subject to these unseen powers. There is a division line well defined that separates the Lord’s territory from Lucifer’s. If we live on the Lord’s side of the line Lucifer cannot come there to influence us, but if we cross the line into his territory we are in his power. By keeping the commandments of the Lord we are safe on His side of the line, but if we disobey His teachings we voluntarily cross into the zone of temptation and invite the destruction that is ever present there. Knowing this, how anxious we should always be to live on the Lord’s side of the line” (*Improvement Era*, May 1935, 278).

How Do You Know?

Now you may feel that I have given you only modest hope. You and everyone want to know, to be sure—if possi-



T *True faith in the Atonement of Jesus Christ, rather than leading you to try a little sin, will lead you to stay as far away from it as you can.*

ble, by some clear sign—that your sins are remitted.

As if he knew my concern, and yours, to discern whether we were moving toward Christ, Elder Tuttle took me to a scripture. The reference is written in the margin next to the beginning of the 15th verse. Here is all it says: “Alma 5:14, 15, 26–31.” And then these words, written very small: “Born again and retaining remission. How do you know?”

“And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?

“Do ye exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you? Do you look forward with an eye of faith, and view this mortal body raised in immortality, and this corruption raised in incorruption, to stand before God to be judged according to the deeds which have been done in the mortal body?” (Alma 5:14–15).

As Elder Tuttle read those words that day, I knew what I wanted. I wanted the Master’s image in my countenance, perhaps not visible to others, but so that I might look forward with the eye of faith to that grand reunion. I wanted to have confidence that I would someday and somewhere hear the words: “Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth” (Alma 5:16).

I pray that you and I will make the choices today and tomorrow and as long as we live that will bring the influence of the Holy Ghost into our lives in the service of the Master. I testify that as we do, we will feel the cleansing that comes through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, and with it the confidence that we are coming unto Him. And when we are there, with Him and sanctified, we shall never hunger nor thirst again. **NE**

From an address given at Brigham Young University on October 29, 1989.