



By Linda S. Reeves
Second Counselor in the Relief Society General Presidency

The Great Plan of Redemption

I know that when we sincerely repent of our sins, they are truly gone—without a trace!

A few months before President Boyd K. Packer passed away, general priesthood and auxiliary leaders had the precious opportunity of having him speak to us. I have not been able to quit thinking about what he said. He shared that he had searched backward throughout his lifetime, looking for evidence of the sins that he had committed and sincerely repented of, and he could find *no trace* of them. Because of the atoning sacrifice of our beloved Savior, Jesus Christ, and through sincere repentance, his sins were completely gone, as if they had never happened. President Packer then charged us as leaders that day to testify that this is true for each one of us who sincerely repents.

I'm aware of a man who was involved in moral transgressions several years ago. For some time, this man felt too ashamed and too worried to approach his wife and his priesthood leaders. He wanted to fully repent but actually expressed that he was willing to give up his own eternal salvation rather than put his spouse and children through the sorrow, shame, or other consequences that might be caused by his confession.

When we have sinned, Satan often tries to convince us that the unselfish thing to do is to protect others from the devastation of the knowledge of our sins, including avoiding confessing to our bishop, who can bless our lives through his priesthood keys as a common judge in Israel. The truth, however, is that the unselfish and Christlike thing to do is to confess and repent. This is Heavenly Father's great plan of redemption.

Finally, this dear man confessed to his faithful wife and his Church leaders,

expressing deep remorse. Though it was the most difficult thing he had ever done, feelings of relief, peace, gratitude, love for our Savior, and a knowledge that the Lord was lifting his heavy burden and carrying him caused joy beyond expression, regardless of the outcome and his future.

He had been certain that his wife and children would be devastated—and they were; and that there would be disciplinary action and a release from his calling—and there was. He was certain that his wife would be brokenhearted, hurt, and angry—and she was. And he was convinced that she would leave, taking the children with her—but she didn't.

Sometimes serious transgression leads to divorce, and depending on circumstances, that might be necessary. But to this man's amazement, his wife embraced him and dedicated herself to helping him in any way that she could. Over time, she was able to fully forgive him. She had felt the healing power of the Savior's Atonement for her. Years later, this couple and their three children are strong and faithful. The husband and wife serve in the temple and have a wonderful, loving marriage. The depth of this man's testimony and



his love and gratitude for the Savior are so evident in his life.

Amulek testified, “I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; . . . if ye will repent . . . , immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you.”¹

When I served with my husband as he presided over a mission, we went to the airport to pick up a large group of missionaries one morning. One particular young man caught our eye. He seemed sad, weighed down, almost distraught. We watched him carefully that afternoon. By evening, this young man made a belated confession, and his leaders determined that he needed to return home. Although we were very sad that he had been dishonest and had not repented before coming on his mission, on the way to the airport we sincerely and lovingly praised him for having the courage to come forward, and we pledged to stay in close contact with him.

This great young man was blessed to have wonderful parents, great priesthood leaders, and a supportive, loving ward. After a year of working hard to fully repent and partake of the Savior’s Atonement, he was able to return to our mission. It is difficult for me to describe the feelings of joy we felt as we picked up this young man from the airport. He was full of the Spirit, happy, confident before the Lord, and anxious to fulfill a faithful mission. He became an outstanding missionary, and later my husband and I had the privilege of attending his temple sealing.

By contrast, I’m aware of another missionary who, knowing her unconfessed sin from before her mission would surely cause her to be sent home early, made her own plan to work extra hard during her mission



and confess to the mission president just days before completing her mission. She lacked godly sorrow and tried to circumvent the plan that our loving Savior has offered each one of us.

During our mission, I once accompanied my husband when he went to interview a man for baptism. While my husband conducted the interview, I waited outside with the sister missionaries who had taught this man. When the interview was finished, my husband informed the missionaries that the man would be able to be baptized. This dear man wept and wept as he explained that he had been certain that the serious sins he had committed in his life would prevent him from being able to be baptized. I have seldom witnessed the joy and happiness of someone coming out of the darkness and into the light equal to what I witnessed that day.

Elder D. Todd Christofferson testified:

“With faith in [our] merciful Redeemer and His power, potential despair turns to hope. One’s very heart and desires change, and the once-appealing sin becomes increasingly abhorrent. . . .

“ . . . Whatever the cost of repentance, it is swallowed up in the joy of forgiveness.”²

These experiences remind me of Enos in the Book of Mormon, who “cried unto [the Lord] in mighty prayer” and then heard a voice saying, “Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee. . . .

“And I, Enos, knew that God could not lie; wherefore, my guilt was swept away.

“And I said: Lord, how is it done?

“And he said unto me: Because of thy faith in Christ. . . . Go to, thy faith hath made thee whole.”³

In preparing this talk, I wanted to get a feeling for how our grandchildren understand repentance and how they feel about the Savior, so I asked our children to ask them the following questions. I was touched by our grandchildren’s responses.

What is repentance? “When you hit someone, you can say ‘sorry’ and help them up.”

How do you feel when you repent? “You can feel Him; you can feel His warmth, and the bad feeling goes away.”

How do you feel about Jesus and Heavenly Father when you repent? “I feel that Jesus feels it was worth it to do the Atonement, and He’s happy that we can live with Him again.”

Why do Jesus and Heavenly Father want me to repent? In the words of my teenage grandchild: “Because They love me! In order to progress and become like Them, I need to repent. I also want the Spirit to be with me, so I need to repent daily to have His wonderful companionship. I will never be able to thank Them enough.”

When four-year-old Brynlee heard these questions, she said, “I don’t know, Daddy. You teach me.”



By Elder M. Russell Ballard
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

In a past general conference, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland declared: “However late you think you are, however many chances you think you have missed, however many mistakes you feel you have made . . . , or however far from home and family and God you feel you have traveled, I testify that you have *not* traveled beyond the reach of divine love. It is not possible for you to sink lower than the infinite light of Christ’s Atonement shines.”⁴

Oh, how I want each of my children, grandchildren, and each of you, my brothers and sisters, to feel the joy and closeness to Heavenly Father and to our Savior as we daily repent of our sins and weaknesses. Each accountable child of Heavenly Father needs repentance. Consider what sins we need to repent of. What is holding us back? In what ways do we need to improve?

I know, as President Packer experienced and testified, that when we sincerely repent of our sins, they are truly gone—without a trace! I have personally felt the love, the joy, the relief, and the confidence before the Lord as I have sincerely repented.

To me, the greatest miracles in life are not the parting of the Red Sea, the moving of mountains, or even the healing of the body. The greatest miracle happens when we humbly approach our Father in Heaven in prayer, fervently plead to be forgiven, and then are cleansed of those sins through the atoning sacrifice of our Savior. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Alma 34:31.
2. D. Todd Christofferson, “The Divine Gift of Repentance,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2011, 40.
3. Enos 1:4–8.
4. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Laborers in the Vineyard,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2012, 33.

To Whom Shall We Go?

In the end, each one of us must respond to the Savior’s question: “Will ye also go away?”

Several years ago my family and I visited the Holy Land. One of my vivid memories from our trip was a visit to the upper room in Jerusalem, the traditional site of the Last Supper.

As we stood in that place, I read to them from John 17, where Jesus pleads with His Father for His disciples:

“I pray for them . . . that they may be one, as we are. . . .

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.”¹

I was deeply moved while reading these words and found myself praying in that sacred place that I could ever be one with my family and with my Heavenly Father and with His Son.

Our precious relationships with families, friends, the Lord, and His restored Church are among the things that matter most in life. Because these relationships are so important, they should be cherished, protected, and nurtured.

One of the most heart-wrenching stories in scripture occurred when “many of [the Lord’s] disciples” found it hard to accept His teachings and doctrine, and they “went back, and *walked no more with him.*”²

As these disciples left, Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, “Will ye also go away?”³

Peter responded:

“Lord, *to whom shall we go?* thou hast the words of eternal life.

“And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.”⁴

In that moment, when others focused on what they could not accept, the Apostles chose to focus on what they *did* believe and know, and as a result, they remained with Christ.

Later, on the day of Pentecost, the Twelve received the gift of the Holy Ghost. They became bold in their witness of Christ and began to understand more fully Jesus’s teachings.

Today is no different. For some, Christ’s invitation to believe and remain continues to be hard—or difficult to accept. Some disciples struggle to understand a specific Church policy or teaching. Others find concerns in our history or in the imperfections of some members and leaders, past and present. Still others find it difficult to live a religion that requires so much. Finally, some have become “weary in well-doing.”⁵ For these and other reasons, some Church members vacillate in their faith, wondering if perhaps they should