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Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Finding Your Life

In giving His life, Christ saved not only His own life but our lives as well. He made it possible for us to exchange what would otherwise have been an ultimately futile mortal life for eternal life.

When Jesus and His Apostles were together in Caesarea Philippi, He asked them this question, “Whom say ye that I am?” (Matthew 16:15). Peter, with reverent eloquence and power, responded, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16; see also Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20).

It thrills me to read those words; it thrills me to say them. Shortly after this sacred moment, when Jesus spoke to the Apostles about His impending death and Resurrection, Peter contradicted Him. This earned Peter a stinging rebuke—for not being in tune with, or not savoring, the things of God “but those that be of men” (Matthew 16:21–23; see also Mark 8:33). Then Jesus, “showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom [He had] reproved” (D&C 121:43), kindly instructed Peter and his Brethren about taking up one’s cross and losing one’s life as the way to find an abundant and eternal life, He being the perfect example (see Matthew 16:24–25).

I want to talk about the Lord’s seemingly paradoxical declaration that “He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:39; see also Matthew 10:32–41; 16:24–28; Mark 8:34–38; Luke 9:23–26; 17:33). It teaches a powerful, far-reaching doctrine we need to understand and apply.

A thoughtful professor offered this insight: “As the heavens are higher than the earth, God’s work in your life is bigger than the story you’d like that life to tell. His

life is bigger than your plans, goals, or fears. To save your life, you'll have to lay down your stories and, minute by minute, day by day, give your life back to him.”¹

The more I think about it, the more amazed I am at how consistently Jesus gave His life to the Father, how perfectly He lost His life in the will of the Father—in life and in death. This is precisely the opposite of Satan's attitude and approach, which have been widely adopted in today's self-centered world.

In the premortal council, in volunteering to fill the role of Savior in the Father's divine plan, Jesus said, “Father, *thy* will be done, and the glory be *thine* forever” (Moses 4:2; emphasis added). Lucifer, on the other hand, declared, “Behold, here am I, send me, *I* will be thy son, and *I* will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely *I* will do it; wherefore give *me* thine honor” (Moses 4:1; emphasis added).

Christ's commandment to follow Him is a commandment to reject once again the Satanic model and to lose our life in favor of the real life, the authentic life, the celestial kingdom-enabled life that God envisions for each of us. That life will bless everyone we touch and will make saints of us. With our current, limited vision, it is a life that is beyond comprehension. Indeed, “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

I wish we had more of the conversation between Jesus and His disciples. It would have been helpful to have some additional light about what it means, in practice, to lose one's life for His sake and thereby find it. But as I pondered it, I realized that the Savior's comments just before and after His declaration provide valuable guidance. Let's consider three of these contextual comments.

Take Up Your Cross Daily

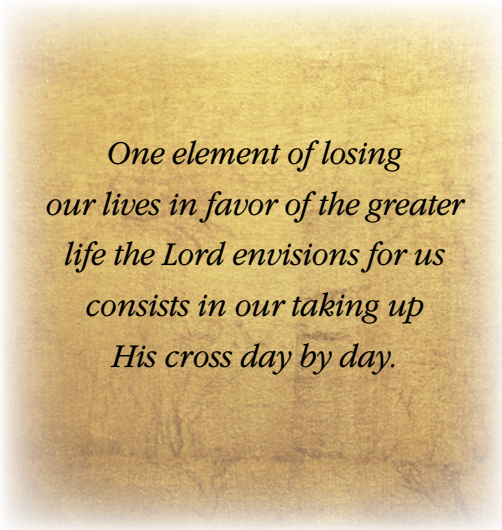
First are the Lord's words spoken just before He said, “Whosoever will save his life shall lose it” (Matthew 16:25). As recorded in each of the synoptic Gospels, Jesus said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). Luke adds the word *daily*—“let him . . . take up his cross daily” (Luke 9:23). In Matthew, the Joseph Smith Translation expands this statement with the Lord's definition of what it means to take up one's cross: “And now for a man to take up his cross, is to deny himself all ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and keep my commandments” (Matthew 16:24, footnote *e*).

This accords with James's declaration: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, . . . to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). Taking up one's cross is a daily life of avoiding all that is unclean while affirmatively keeping the two great commandments—love of God and love of fellow man—on which all other commandments hang (see Matthew 22:37–40). Thus, one element of losing our lives in favor of the greater life the Lord envisions for us consists in our taking up His cross day by day.

Confess Christ before Others

A second accompanying statement suggests that finding our life by losing it for the Savior's sake and the gospel's sake entails a willingness to make our discipleship open and public. “Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38; see also Luke 9:26).

Elsewhere in Matthew, we find a companion statement:



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“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.

“But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32–33).

One obvious and rather sobering meaning of losing your life by confessing Christ is to lose it literally in sustaining and defending your belief in Him. We have grown accustomed to thinking of this extreme requirement as applying in history as we read about the martyrs of the past, including most of the ancient Apostles. Now we see, however, that what was historical is moving into the present.²

We know not what may come in the future, but if any of us should face the trauma of literally losing our life in the Master’s cause, I trust that we would show courage and loyalty.

The more common (and sometimes more difficult) application of the Savior’s teaching, however, has to do with how we live day by day. It concerns the words we speak, the example we set. Our lives should be a confession of Christ and, together with our words, testify of our faith in and devotion to Him. And this testimony must be stoutly defended in the face of ridicule, discrimination, or defamation on the part of those who oppose Him “in this adulterous and sinful generation” (Mark 8:38).

On a different occasion the Lord added this remarkable statement about our loyalty to Him: “Think not that I am come to send peace on [the] earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.

“For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against

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her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

“And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.

“He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

“And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:34–38).

Saying that He came not to send peace but rather a sword seems at first impression a contradiction to the scriptures that refer to Christ as “The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6), the proclamation at His birth—“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14)—and other well-known

references, such as “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you” (John 14:27).

“It is true that Christ came to bring peace—peace between the believer and God, and peace among men. Yet the inevitable result of Christ’s coming is conflict—between Christ and the antichrist, between light and darkness, between Christ’s children and the devil’s children. This conflict can occur even between members of the same family.”³

I’m confident that a number of you have been rejected and ostracized by father and mother, brothers and sisters as you accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ and entered into His covenant. In one way or another, your superior love of Christ has required the sacrifice of relationships that were dear to you, and you have shed many tears. Yet with your own love undiminished, you hold steady under this cross, showing yourself unashamed of the Son of God.

The Cost of Discipleship

A few years ago a member of the Church shared a copy of the Book of Mormon with an Amish friend in Ohio, USA. The friend began to read the book and could not put it down. He and his wife were baptized, and within seven months two more Amish couples were converted and baptized members of the Church. Their children were baptized several months later.

These three families decided to remain in their community and continue their Amish lifestyle even though they had left the Amish faith. However, they were subjected to “shunning” by their close-knit Amish neighbors. Shunning means that no one in their Amish community will talk to them, work with

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them, do business with them, or associate with them in any way. This includes not just friends but also family members.

Initially, these Amish Saints felt alone and isolated as even their children were subjected to shunning and were removed from their Amish schools. Their children have endured shunning by grandparents, cousins, and close neighbors. Even some of the older children of these Amish families, who did not accept the gospel, will not talk to or even acknowledge their parents. These families have struggled to recover from the social and economic effects of shunning, but they are succeeding.

Their faith remains strong. The adversity and opposition of shunning has caused them to be steadfast and immovable. A year after being baptized, the families were sealed in the temple and continue faithfully attending the temple on a weekly basis. They have found strength through receiving ordinances and entering into and honoring covenants. They are all active in their Church group and continue searching for ways to share the light and knowledge of the gospel with their extended families and community through acts of kindness and service.

Yes, the cost of joining The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can be very high, but the admonition to prefer Christ above all others, even our closest family members, applies also to those who may have been born in the covenant. Many of us became members of the Church without opposition, perhaps as children. The challenge we may confront is remaining loyal to the Savior and His Church in the face of parents, in-laws, brothers or sisters, or even our children whose conduct, beliefs, or choices make it impossible to support both Him and them.

It is not a question of love. We can and must love one another as Jesus loves us. As He said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to

another” (John 13:35). So although familial love continues, relationships may be interrupted and, according to the circumstances, even support or tolerance at times may be suspended for the sake of our higher love (see Matthew 10:37).

In reality, the best way to help those we love—the best

way to love them—is to continue to put the Savior first. If we cast ourselves adrift from the Lord out of sympathy for loved ones who are suffering or distressed, then we lose the means by which we might have helped them. If, however, we remain firmly rooted in faith in Christ, we are in a position both to receive and to offer divine help.

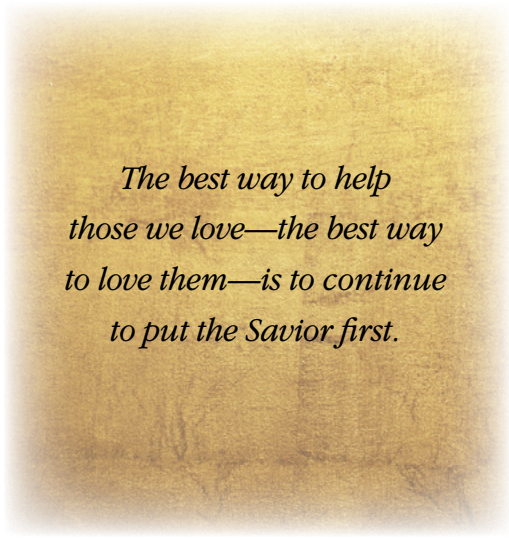
When the moment comes that a beloved family member wants desperately to turn to the only true and lasting source of help, he or she will know whom to trust as a

guide and a companion. In the meantime, with the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide, we can perform a steady ministry to lessen the pain of poor choices and bind up the wounds insofar as we are permitted. Otherwise, we serve neither those we love nor ourselves.

Forsake the World

The third element of losing our lives for the Lord’s sake is found in His words: “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26). As given in the Joseph Smith Translation, His words read: “For what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and yet he receive him not whom God hath ordained, and he lose his own soul, and he himself be a castaway?” (Luke 9:25 [in the Bible appendix]).

To say that forsaking the world in favor of receiving “him . . . whom God hath ordained” is countercultural in today’s world is certainly an understatement. The priorities



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and interests we most often see on display around us (and sometimes in us) are intensely selfish: a hunger to be recognized; an insistent demand that one's rights be respected; a consuming desire for money, things, and power; a sense of entitlement to a life of comfort and pleasure; a goal to minimize responsibility and avoid altogether any personal sacrifice for the good of another—to name a few.

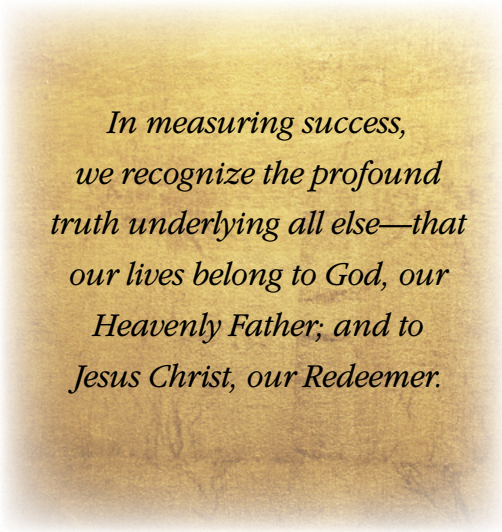
This is not to say that we should not seek to succeed, even excel, in worthy endeavors, including education and honorable work. Certainly, worthwhile achievements are laudable. But if we are to save our lives, we must always remember that such attainments are not ends in themselves but means to a higher end. With our faith in Christ, we must see political, business, academic, and similar forms of success not as defining us but as making possible our service to God and fellow man—beginning at home and extending as far as possible in the world.

Personal development has value as it contributes to development of a Christlike character. In measuring success, we recognize the profound truth underlying all else—that our lives belong to God, our Heavenly Father; and to Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. Success means living in harmony with Their will.

In contrast to the narcissistic life, President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) offered a simple expression of the more excellent way:

“When we are engaged in the service of our fellowmen, not only do our deeds assist them, but we put our own problems in a fresher perspective. When we concern ourselves more with others, there is less time to be concerned with ourselves! In the midst of the miracle of serving, there is the promise of Jesus that by losing ourselves, we find ourselves! [See Matthew 10:39.]

“Not only do we ‘find’ ourselves in terms of acknowledging divine guidance in our lives, but the more we serve our fellowmen in appropriate ways, the more substance there is to our souls. . . . We become more substantive as we serve others—indeed, it is easier to ‘find’ ourselves because there is so much more of us to find!”⁴



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Lose Your Life in His Service

I recently learned of a particular young adult sister who decided to serve a full-time mission. She had developed a capacity to connect with and relate to people from almost every belief system, political persuasion, and nationality, and she worried that wearing a missionary name tag all day, every day, might become an identifier that could impede her exceptional ability to establish relationships. Just a few

weeks into her mission, she wrote home about a simple but meaningful experience:

“Sister Lee and I rubbed salve into an old lady’s arthritic hands—one of us on either side—while we sat in her living room. She didn’t want to listen to any spoken messages, but let us sing, loved us to sing. Thank you, black missionary name tag, for giving me license to have intimate experiences with complete strangers.”

By the things he suffered, the Prophet Joseph Smith learned to lose his life in the service of his Master and Friend. He once said, “I made this my rule: *When the Lord commands, do it.*”⁵

I think we would all be content to match Brother Joseph’s level of faithfulness. Even so, he was once forced to languish for months in the jail at Liberty, Missouri, suffering physically but probably more emotionally and spiritually because he was unable to help his beloved wife, his children, and the Saints while they were being abused and persecuted. His revelations and direction had brought



them to Missouri to establish Zion, and now they were being driven from their homes, in winter, across the entire state.

Despite it all, in those conditions in that jail, he composed an inspired letter to the Church of the most elegant and uplifting prose, parts of which now comprise sections 121, 122, and 123 of the Doctrine and Covenants, concluding with these words: “Let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed” (D&C 123:17).

Of course, the greatest illustration of saving one’s life by losing it is this: “O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done” (Matthew 26:42). In giving His life, Christ saved not only His own life but our lives as well. He

made it possible for us to exchange what would otherwise have been an ultimately futile mortal life for eternal life.

The theme of the Savior’s life was “I do always those things that please [the Father]” (John 8:29). I pray that you will make it the theme of your life. If you do, you will save your life. ■

From a Church Educational System devotional address, “Saving Your Life,” delivered at Brigham Young University on September 14, 2014. For the full address, go to devotionals.lds.org.

NOTES

1. Adam S. Miller, *Letters to a Young Mormon* (2014), 17–18.
2. See Martin Chulov, “Iraq’s Largest Christian Town Abandoned as ISIS Advance Continues,” *The Guardian*, Aug. 7, 2014, theguardian.com.
3. Kenneth Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible*, 10th anniversary ed. (1995), 1453.
4. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (2006), 85–86.
5. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 160.

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