

Voices from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Worldview Traditions

Over the last few years we have collated responses to questions about religion and worldviews from different perspectives. This resource provides personal answers to questions from lived experience and were written directly by believers.

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1. What is it like being a part of a minority faith in British society?

I have been a member of the Church for about thirty years, and for the last twenty-four years have been married and brought up children within the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In some ways living as a member of the Church is fairly counter cultural- some things make me smile, some other things are a bit of a challenge, but only in the sense that some people don't always understand why we do certain things.

The experiences that make me smile generally surround the Word of Wisdom- the commandment that includes prohibitions against tea, coffee, alcohol, tobacco and harmful drugs. I am usually met with incredulity that I don't drink tea and attending weddings where I ask for Shloer or orange juice sometimes raises confusion. But on the whole, most people are very respectful, and it is not hard at all to keep these commandments. Sometimes I worry for my teenage children as the pressures are very high for them- fortunately they have friends who respect them.

Being a person of faith is becoming less common in society- and so I think the general challenges faced by most people who believe in God- that it seems rather odd to some is replicated, but it's not an issue really.

Living as a member of the Church has also helped me make decisions as to who I am and what I accept/believe/do. Because my faith is not large in the British Isles, if I didn't believe it would be easy to not live the principles. But I had to make a decision, that this is what I believe, and I have to stand firm in my beliefs. I don't do things just because it is the norm or a cultural tradition. I choose to believe, and I choose to act.

Some things are difficult- but it's more logistically so. Trying to find clothes that my wife and daughters can wear that are not too short but are modest is difficult with today's fashions. Sometimes deciding which programmes to watch or not is also difficult. I can't join in the 'water cooler' conversations about Game of Thrones or the like as I choose not to watch them because of my principles. I have to say that my colleagues are very supportive, and there are lots of other things we can talk about

2. What are your thoughts on speciesism?

It is not something I have considered until recently. It has made the news. I was not really aware that it was a thing- maybe that is my ignorance and reflective of my speciesism. I think it is important to treat animals with respect in our actions. One suggestion of speciesism is that our language reflects a superiority on the part of humans, and a disregard of the animal world. This issue is an area that I am only beginning to think about- humanity is the pinnacle of God's creation, but this does not mean that we should be dismissive of the rights of animals.

"Kindness to the whole animal creation and especially to all domestic animals is not only a virtue that should be developed but is the absolute duty of mankind. ... It is an unrighteous thing to treat any creature cruelly. ... It will be a blessed day when mankind shall accept and abide by the Christ-like sentiment expressed by one of the poets in the following words: 'Take not away the life you cannot give, For all things have an equal right to live.'"

Further,

"... Nature helps us to see and understand God. To all His creations we owe an allegiance of service and a profound admiration. Man should be kind to the animals which serve him both directly and indirectly. An angry word or a brutal blow wounds the heart from which it comes. Love of nature is akin to the love of God; the two are inseparable" (George Q. Cannon "Kindness to Animals," Juvenile Instructor February 1912).

3. Are you a vegetarian or vegan?

Personally, I am not a vegetarian or a vegan. It is part of my health code, known as the Word of Wisdom, to eat meat sparingly. As such I am not averse to vegetarianism or veganism. I choose, however, to eat meat but not excessively.

I have a friend (who is not Latter-day Saint) who has started an organisation that encourages companies, etc to default to vegetarian in the food provided. For a meat alternative a person would have to request it. I think this is a nice idea.

4. Have you ever worked or volunteered to help the planet?

This is something that I feel passionately about and is an important part of my faith. I believe that creation is important and is a gift of God to be treated as sacred. I have never belonged to, or worked for, an environmental organisation. I do, however, work in every aspect of my life to care for creation. The Church has taught: "The earth and all things on it should be used responsibly to sustain the human family. However, all are stewards — not owners — over this earth and its bounty and will be accountable before God for what they do with His creations. Approaches to the environment must be prudent, realistic, balanced and consistent with the needs of the earth and of current and future generations, rather than pursuing the immediate vindication of personal desires or avowed rights. The earth and all life upon it are much more than items to be consumed or conserved. God intends His creations to be aesthetically pleasing to enliven the mind and spirit, and some portions are to be preserved. Making the earth ugly offends Him." As such, I recycle everything that I can and strive to have a life that considers the environment in the decisions that I make. Sometimes, however, pragmatism and convenience can influence some ideas. For example, I drive an hour to work, rather than using public transport that would take over two hours- in this way my actions may not reflect my beliefs perfectly.

5. Are you morally absolute or morally relative about your views on veganism and vegetarianism?

Personally, I tend to be morally relative- it very much depends on the circumstance and my culture as to what I would eat and what I would not. I recognise that my view is a reflection of my understanding and background, within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints there is a plethora of views and actions with regard to veganism and vegetarianism.

6. What is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints view on meat eating?

The teaching of the Word of Wisdom, a revelation from God, is that: “eat meat sparingly” (D&C 89). This means that it is allowable to eat meat, but not as an extreme. What this means is a personal interpretation. This builds on a further revelation:

“For, behold, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and that which cometh of the earth, is ordained for the use of man for food and for raiment, and that he might have in abundance... And wo be unto man that sheddeth blood or that wasteth flesh and hath no need.” (D&C 49:19, 21).

This builds on a knowledge that all of the animal world are creations of God. We believe that animals will be resurrected, Joseph Smith taught that all animals “might be seen in heaven.” He continued: “John [the Revelator] learned that God glorified Himself by saving all that His hands had made, whether beasts, fowls, fishes, or men. ...” (Documentary History of the Church, vol. 5, p. 343.)

George Q. Cannon highlighted how the killing of animals for food should not be indiscriminate:

“Our sense of appreciation should be quickened by a desire to understand divine purposes, and to keep the balance of animal life adjusted to the needs of creation. [Humans in their] wanton disregard of a sacred duty has been reckless of life. [They] has destroyed it with an indifference to the evil results it would entail upon the earth. Birds have been uselessly slaughtered, and pests have sprung up as a consequence to plague the people of the world. Animals in the providence of the creation have been intended as a prey upon one another. They preserve a safe balance for the benefit of [humanity]... The unnecessary destruction of life is a distinct spiritual loss to the human family. [Humans] cannot worship the Creator and look with careless indifference upon his creations. The love of all life helps [people] to the enjoyment of a better life. It exalts the spiritual nature of those in need of divine favour. The wanton destruction of life reacts upon the human family.” (George Q. Cannon “Kindness to Animals,” Juvenile Instructor February 1912).

While animals can be eaten, it should not lead to a wanton killing of animals. Although this is the teaching, it is up to the individual as to how much, if any, meat they will eat.

7. How is it possible for someone who is all loving to allow pain and suffering on this earth and why would he allow it?

You raise a very interesting question, and for me, as an individual probably the biggest challenge to my belief and faith. As I look around the world and see so many people suffering it challenges all that I believe in God. However, because of religious experiences throughout my life which have built my faith when I seek to answer this question I begin from the premise that I do have a loving Father in heaven who is seeking the very best for me.

As you will probably be aware there are many explanations given to the problem of evil (theodicies) from philosophers and believers alike. There is a couple of the ‘classical’ theodicies that begin to help me understand and provide a response.

The first response refers to the existence of free will, it is sometimes known as the Augustinian theodicy. God created a perfect world with Adam and Eve being perfect also. He did, however, give them free will, the ability to choose for themselves. When they ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge sin, death and suffering entered the world. This suggests that God is not to blame for the evil and suffering that is in the universe, rather it is caused by human free will. As a loving God he must allow his creations to make mistakes, or he would not be all loving. The purpose of this life is to recapture the perfection that was in the Garden of Eden. Wrong choices lead people away from that goal, but Jesus makes up the difference and makes people whole again in the afterlife. This links very much with the balancing of suffering in the afterlife.

A simple way to explain this is that humanity began as a smooth pebble as a result of the fall chips and gouges in the stone arose. The purpose of this life, and the atonement of Christ is fill in these chips to make the pebble perfect again.

Although the free will theodicy could be seen to explain moral evil in that it is all humanity's fault. It does not address the issue of natural evil. Except, that it also argues that when humanity "fell" because of Adam and Eve's choice so did the world. So, it was humanity that caused the change in the world enabling the flaws which result in natural evil.

As a Latter-day Saint I believe that Adam and Eve are emblematic of each of us. We are all susceptible to sin, and all of us sin, and so the choices that we make could be responsible for evil. Unfortunately, we are susceptible to the consequences of not just our sin, but also the sins of others- this may be the reason that seemingly good people suffer, while 'bad' people find success in this life. There is an event in The Book of Mormon where believers are being burned:

And they brought their wives and children together, and whosoever believed or had been taught to believe in the word of God they caused that they should be cast into the fire; and they also brought forth their records which contained the holy scriptures, and cast them into the fire also, that they might be burned and destroyed by fire. And it came to pass that they took Alma and Amulek, and carried them forth to the place of martyrdom, that they might witness the destruction of those who were consumed by fire. And when Amulek saw the pains of the women and children who were consuming in the fire, he also was pained; and he said unto Alma: How can we witness this awful scene? Therefore, let us stretch forth our hands, and exercise the power of God, which is in us, and save them from the flames. But Alma said unto him: The Spirit constraineth me that I must not stretch forth mine hand; for behold the Lord receiveth them up unto himself, in glory; and he doth suffer that they may do this thing, or that the people may do this thing unto them, according to the hardness of their hearts, that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just; and the blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them, yea, and cry mightily against them at the last day (Alma 14:8-11).

This suggests that all of the suffering that we encounter will be made right in the afterlife. I recognise that this isn't the most comforting in the immediate context of suffering, but it provides hope for the future. For me, the purpose of suffering is not to punish- this would make God a harsh taskmaster rather than a loving Father- though if we look in the Old Testament, he seems to have done this on occasion. I prefer to focus on his loving nature.

The second response is linked with the free will theodicy but adopts a slightly different approach. The Irenaean theodicy tries to justify the existence of suffering as a necessary part of God's plan. This world is a preparation for heaven as such that if people are to improve themselves, they need to experience evil and suffering in order to become perfect. To reuse the example of a pebble; humanity is created as a pebble with lots of rough edges. As they are rubbed against suffering and battered about these rough edges are smoothed until the smooth pebble is made in the end. All of the sufferings of this life are rewarded in heaven or punished in hell.

This could be seen to explain the existence of suffering, but it may not suggest the kindest approach that God could have taken. It seems that God is punishing people in order to make them better.

Other suggestions blame the devil (but is God not more powerful than him); or as a punishment from God (again this makes a harsh God); or as a way to appreciate the good.

I feel that the answer is a combination of the two; because of the Fall of Adam and Eve there has to be an opposition:

For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, my firstborn in the wilderness, righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one; wherefore, if it should be one body it must needs remain as dead, having no life neither death, nor corruption nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility (2 Nephi 2:11).

Through this opposition of evil and suffering we are able to find God and feel of his love in our everyday lives. I feel that a life full of good would teach us nothing. We would never appreciate the good that we have if we never experienced the bad. People have to taste the bitter to appreciate the sweet. If all you had to eat was

chocolate it would get pretty boring after a while. But through all of this suffering, I believe that God is alongside us, weeping with us and drying our tears. The atonement of Jesus Christ is not just for our sins, but also for our sufferings:

And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succour his people according to their infirmities (alma 7:11-12).

He is always there to comfort and strengthen me and each one of us as we turn to him.

There is, however, a third response which I feel is far more important than the philosophical responses. This is how we respond to the suffering we find around us. The way I respond to this suffering becomes an integral part of my religion. Jesus commanded to help other people (e.g. "Love your neighbour" and the Good Samaritan):

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' (Luke 10: 30-35).

Jesus' use of the Samaritan as an example would have been completely radical to those who were in the audience. Samaritans were hated by the Jews and the expectation would have been that the Samaritan would have ignored the Jew or added to his suffering. His use of a priest and a Levite would have been equally shocking as people who would have been expected to help. It has been suggested by some Christians that the Levite or priest may have had good reasons not to help; the touching of blood may have made them unclean, or the wounded man may have been a decoy to entrap people to be robbed. The fact that the Samaritan helped with no qualms, and beyond the initial pity exemplifies for me the attitude they should adopt when I see people suffering.

Therefore, when there is suffering in the world, I should respond by offering and giving help. It could be praying for those who suffer, providing meals for emergency services or individuals, moving debris, rebuilding homes, donating money, and the list could go on. And, I think this is the idea that evil can result in good- in that it

motivates us to reach out and perform good actions.

8. To you, what is the most important thing about being a Latter-Day Saint?

For me the most important 'thing' is my relationship with my Heavenly Father and my Saviour Jesus Christ. These are the foundation of my faith and affects every decision that I make. I remember reading as a teenager that I should love my Saviour more than I love anyone else- I really struggled with this idea. I had a mum, a brother and a sister at this point- and while I could imagine loving anyone more than my brother ___ I really couldn't imagine loving someone more than my mum and little sister. I then heard something that crystallised everything for me 'As you love the Saviour, your capacity to love others increases'. Because I love my Saviour, I could love my family even more. If I think about my relationship with my wife and children, this is so true- not least because we believe that family relationships are eternal. If I love my Saviour, I can be with my family forever- I can both love them better and longer. I seek to emulate him in all that I do- I obviously fall short, but if I can follow his example, I can be sure that I can be the very best kind of person. I sometimes struggle with

low self-esteem, etc but knowing that I am a child of Heavenly Parents and I have a Saviour who died for me, helps me realise the irrationality of self-doubt.

9. How did you become a Latter-Day Saint? What has made you stay when it is such a small community in this country?

My experience of the Church began when I was seven years old. I came home from the park to find four American men gardening in my front garden. I remember they seemed huge and so exciting with their accents. Over the coming weeks they continued to come around, I remember playing American Football with them, making and eating pizza with them, and being introduced to some strange delicacies such as sunflower seeds and fireball gobstoppers. During this time, I began attending Church with my mum and brother- I loved Church and the many friends I made. Lots of people invited us round for dinner and took time to get to know us— it was a nice place to be. My eighth birthday is still my most favourite birthday to this day. I remember my party in the back garden with the missionaries helping with the piggyback fights and races, but perhaps most importantly the day after my birthday I was baptised. I don't remember much apart from the excitement, the 6' 5 missionary and looking up from the font to see so many people come to see me be baptised. The teachings I received were so important— I remember that not long after my baptism I went to France on an exchange trip. The first night there I missed home so much that I began to cry, it was then that I remembered my mum's teaching about prayer. I remember vividly kneeling down to pray to my Heavenly Father and ask that these feelings be taken away- after all I still had a week left. I finished my prayer and climbed back into bed, my heart comforted and my Spirits lifted. This is the earliest spiritual experience I can recall. From this time, I often remember looking at the deacons and feeling that I couldn't wait to be old enough to pass the sacrament. Unfortunately, this was to be a lot longer than we anticipated.

About this time my mum got a new job as a prison officer and married her second husband (my dad died when I was three). We moved away and Church wasn't a part of our life anymore. It seems strange but throughout our time away I often told people that I was a Mormon if they ever asked my religion. It took my mum to divorce and us to move to Macclesfield for Church to begin to play a part in our lives again.

When we moved to Macclesfield, I was 14 and to coin a phrase "searching". My paper round took me past the chapel, but I never visited. I went into the local Church of England for a chat with the vicar, but he wasn't available. So that was that. Until one day I came home from school to find two missionaries in the front room. I said "Hello" and went upstairs to put some music on. My mum shouted me down and told me off for being rude- the missionaries wanted to speak with me. Apparently, they had been visiting with her for about a month, but this was the first time they had caught me in. They told me that my mum was coming to Church that Sunday with my baby sister, but that my older brother had no interest. Did I want to come? I said "Alright" and went back to my music. In some ways that is my conversion story- I have been active in Church since that very next Sunday. I went there, felt at home and spoke to the missionaries about wanting the Aaronic Priesthood (being 15 1 was now old enough). The missionaries realised they needed to keep me coming so sports activities began again- this time badminton at the leisure centre. The older youth in my ward took me under their wing and I never seemed to look back.

Until my final year of secondary where I was invited by my Sunday School teacher to fast and pray about the Book of Mormon- my assumption and automatic acceptance of its truthfulness didn't seem enough if I was to serve a mission. I fasted and prayed- and remember reading 3 Nephi 17 with tears in my eyes to confirm the testimony I feel I had always had since the age of 8- the word of the Lord to Oliver Cowdery seemed to speak straight to me: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, if you desire a further witness, cast your mind upon the night that you cried unto me in your heart, that you might know concerning the truth of these things. Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have than from God?" (D&C 6:22-23). My testimony was confirmed and there has not been a single doubt since then. To paraphrase and misquote Joseph Smith: "So it was with me. I had actually seen felt the Spirit, and it did in reality speak to me; and though I may be hated and persecuted for saying that I had felt the Spirit, yet it was true; and while they were persecuting me, reviling me, and speaking all manner of evil against me falsely for so saying, I was led to say in my heart: Why persecute me for telling the truth? I have actually felt the Spirit; and who am I that I can withstand God, or why does the world think to make me deny what I had actually felt? For I have felt the Spirit; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it; at least I knew that by so

doing I would offend God, and come under condemnation". I know my Saviour lives and stand amazed at all that he has done for me.

That's my 'conversion' story, but I have continued since then to build a relationship with my Saviour each and every day of my life- I can't just stand still and hope that everything will stay the same. I have to keep building that relationship through prayer, scripture study and worship.

The size of the Church isn't a huge issue for me and could actually help. I answered a similar question before I have been a member of the Church for about thirty years, and for the last twenty-four years have been married and brought up children within the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In some ways living as a member of the Church is fairly counter cultural- some things make me smile, some other things are a bit of a challenge, but only in the sense that some people don't always understand why we do certain things.

The experiences that make me smile generally surround the Word of Wisdom- the commandment that includes prohibitions against tea, coffee, alcohol, tobacco and harmful drugs. I am usually met with incredulity that I don't drink tea and attending weddings where I ask for Shloer or orange juice sometimes raises confusion. But on the whole, most people are very respectful, and it is not hard at all to keep these commandments. Sometimes I worry for my teenage children as the pressures are very high for them- fortunately they have friends who respect them.

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Living as a member of the Church has also helped me make decisions as to who I am and what I accept/believe/do. Because my faith is not large in the British Isles, if I didn't believe it would be easy to not live the principles. But I had to make a decision, that this is what I believe, and I have to stand firm in my beliefs. I don't do things just because it is the norm or a cultural tradition. I choose to believe, and I choose to act.

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10. Who or what do you worship? Where do you go to worship? How do you worship?

I worship God. The way that I understand God is as my Heavenly Father. All people are children of God and as such we should be in a loving relationship with Him. Alongside my Heavenly Father is the Saviour Jesus Christ, His Son, and the Holy Ghost. All of these form what we term the 'Godhead'- and each of these are important parts of my worship.

There are two types of places of worship in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The first is a church or chapel. The closest that I can see to you is in Crewe. This is a modernish building with a chapel (large room where the main worship service takes place), a hall for sports and various classrooms. The second is a Temple- these are sacred places where only members of the Church can go inside. These are beautiful and sacred places known as the 'House of the Lord'. While I go to Church every week, I will go to the Temple once or twice a month (other people may go more). There are two in the United Kingdom- London and Chorley. (You can find more at <https://www.reonline.org.uk/subject-knowledge/the-church-of-jesus-christ-of-latter-day-saints/places-of-worship/>)

I think there are three answers to how do I worship:

On a Sunday I attend Church and there have a Sacrament meeting followed by lessons for an hour (it's a Sunday School for all different age groups not just for children). The most important part of this service (and

my week) is the sacrament where we take the sacrament (bread and water) in remembrance of Jesus' sacrifice. This enables me to be forgiven of my sins and to recommit to live a good life. We also have talks from members of the congregation (everyone takes turns- my children have all preached in Church from when they were four years old). This is a time where we all come together and strengthen each other (more about this can be found at: <https://www.reonline.org.uk/subject-knowledge/the-church-of-jesus-christ-of-latter-day-saints/religious-ritual-practice/>)

Every day I say my prayers and read the scriptures. I do this on my own and also with my family. We get up at 6:15am to read a passage from the Book of Mormon or Bible and have a prayer. It doesn't have to be this early but one of my children leaves for school at 7am. We have done this since my wife and I got married. We think it helps us come together as a family and draw close to our Saviour and Heavenly Father.

The third is that in everything I do I try and worship God. I wrote about this a while ago and I include that here: At the end of a long week I sat down and evaluated my worship for the week. I concluded that while being incredibly busy, my week had failed to go beyond what I considered to be the bare minimum of worship. I had attended Church on the Sunday which had included taking the sacrament, I had studied and prayed both individually, and with my family, each day, but that was it.

As I looked at the activities my wife and I had been involved with we had spent a total of 50 hours in Church related service. It was only when I looked at that figure, then my forty-hour work week that I began to explore what I could have done more. I then realised that in separating my acts of worship from my acts of Church service I was missing the point.

What was the point? My Church related service activities were acts of worship within themselves. How had I missed this? Maybe a brief list of some of these activities might help the explanation: I had attended a local inter-faith meeting, my wife had attended a Presidency meeting, I had spent two hours sending out invitations to an upcoming event, I had attended the Temple with two of children (okay- that does count as worship), taught with the missionaries and so on.

Most of these events I categorized as administration or organizational, even the teaching I saw as an act of teaching rather than an act of worship. What I had failed to appreciate, is that each of these activities were designed in some way to help others draw closer to Christ, and indeed, at the same time if I did them properly they could also help me draw closer to Him. I needed to refocus my attitude, so they became worship rather than activities.

As I developed this train of thought further, I had the opportunity to teach an undergraduate class on Islam. I taught about the word "Islam" meaning "submission", and that a Muslim would strive to submit to Allah in every aspect of their lives. I realised that the re-evaluation of my Church related activities as worship was only the tip of the iceberg. If I applied what I learnt from Islam, I realised that every aspect of my life: Church, work and family were actually all acts of worship that could draw me closer to the Saviour?

How does this work? As a father, the way that I treat or speak with my children can exemplify my efforts to develop Christlike characteristics, or not as the case may be. The way that I exert my efforts in the workplace can similarly exemplify my promises to "to stand as [a witness] of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that [I] may be in" (Mosiah 18: 9). I am reminded of a passage from *The Shack*: "It's simple, Mack. It's all about relationships and simply sharing life. What we are doing right now- just doing this- and being open and available to others around us. My church is all about people and life is all about relationships" (Young, 2008: 178). Sharing life and engaging in relationships wherever they are found are the acts of worship I am striving to develop.

At the moment I do not know how this newly discovered attitude to worship will work in practice. What I am sure of, is that by striving to include all of my life as an act of worship then I can hopefully draw closer to Christ, and feel less guilt about the "acts of worship" I so dearly wished to do. It does not negate my responsibility to attend Church, the Temple and to study and pray, but if I view every action- whether visiting members of the Church, teaching a University class, or spending time with my family as an opportunity to develop my relationship with the Saviour, as I develop my relationship with others I may be on the right track.