

Friendship

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I want to thank Mark and Carolyn for sacrificing to put this conference together, and for inviting our fellowship to share some thoughts with you all today.

Before I begin the talk, and as a disclaimer, I would like to clarify that the following talk was a collective effort and not solely my work. It was collaboratively written by members of my fellowship - a small group of 5 young families. Therefore, what I am presenting today is our collective talk.

We've been asked by others to share what we believe has made our fellowship grow in the bonds of friendship and unity. What we are going to share are our experiences as a fellowship, the principles we have been guided by, and the standard which we measure ourselves against. We've made our best effort to approach this talk soberly. We do not intend to set ourselves up as the model fellowship but to testify of the fruits of obeying and applying the scriptures in the daily walk of our lives.

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Joseph Smith revealed a *key* to meriting heaven on earth when he taught, "Friendship is one of the grand fundamental principles of "Mormonism"; [it is designed] to revolutionize and civilize the world, and cause wars and contentions to cease and men to become friends and brothers."¹ The friendship he describes is, at a minimum, being able to restrain ourselves from harming one another. A more intimate 'Becoming' can develop when closeness and vulnerability are welcomed. We say closeness and vulnerability, but scriptural language uses "repentance," "confession," coming down "into the depths of humility," and, of course, "love."

With this in mind, this talk will present the guiding principles of our fellowship's friendship, which has, in a natural way, revolutionized and civilized our world and caused contentions to cease as we've sought that friendship Joseph so beautifully described.

We've discovered the power that exists in the new covenant scriptures. The four questions of the 2017 covenant point us, collectively, to these texts in progressive steps toward unity. Together, we've sought to obey the terms of the covenant, and so we've searched the covenant scriptures diligently to guide our daily walk. We've found Joseph of Egypt's prophecy to be true:

¹ Manuscript History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, July 23, 1843, vol. E-1, 1680, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

“[T]hat which [has been] written by the fruit of [Joseph’s] loins, and also that which [has been] written by the fruit of the loins of Judah, [have grown] together unto the confounding of false doctrines, and laying down of contentions, and establishing peace among [us], and bringing [us] to the knowledge of [our] fathers in the latter days, and also to the knowledge of [God’s] covenants.” (2 Ne. 2:4 RE, brackets inserted by us for present-day application)

In the spirit of the guidance given to read and study the Covenant of Christ before the vote, we have decided to use the Covenant of Christ version throughout the remainder of this talk when referencing that text. With that, the Covenant of Christ version of this same scripture gives us even more clarity on what these words mean:

“The things [Joseph’s] offspring [have written] and the things Judah’s offspring [have written, have grown] together in order to expose false doctrines, settle disputes, and establish peace among [us], and bring [us] in the last days to understanding [our] ancestors and comprehending [God’s] covenants.” (2 Ne. 2:4, brackets inserted by us for present-day application)

We’ve found that the covenant scriptures give us a shared vocabulary and understanding as we navigate life together, and prepare for the gathering of all things into one as God begins to fulfill the covenants with our first Fathers. They have answered our questions, resolved our disagreements, and united us in common understanding as we have willingly labored alongside each other² to improve ourselves and obey the guidance offered by them. We know the words of God in the recent Answer to the Prayer about the Covenant of Christ to be true, which states, “My word is truth. My word is spirit... My word carries with it the power of truth.”

The covenant scriptures have taught us specific principles of repentance, which have had the power to change our hearts and draw us together in an unshakable unity. The principles and progression to achieving this unity are outlined in 4th Nephi 1.

4th Nephi 1:1 states:

“... Jesus’ Disciples had formed a congregation of Christ in every surrounding land. Those who came to them and truly repented of their sins were baptized in Jesus’ name and received the Holy Ghost. In the 36th year the people were all converted unto the Lord throughout the land, both Nephites and Lamanites. There were no conflicts or disputes among them. Everyone dealt fairly and honestly with each other. They had all things in common, so there weren’t any rich or poor

² This references what the Lord has asked of us in the Build a House Parable (T&C 176:13).

people, enslaved or free people, but they were all given their freedom and allowed to share in the Heavenly Gift”

This paragraph from 4th Nephi was referenced by Denver in his 2008 talk *Zion Symposium*. He points out that:

“Anytime in the Book of Mormon they’re ticking off a list... [W]hen you encounter a list, you ought to look at it and say to yourself, is this a progression? Is what they’re doing is telling you, “Here is how you get from one point to another.” And we’ve encountered that already in Fourth Nephi.”

We’ve decided to experiment on this word, and have found it to swell within us, and cause fruit to begin to grow. There appear to be seven steps in that first paragraph of 4th Nephi. First, faith. Second, repentance. Third, baptism. Fourth, receiving the Holy Ghost. Fifth, having no conflicts or disputes among them. Sixth, dealing justly, fairly, and honestly with each other. Seventh, having all things in common and sharing in The Heavenly Gift.

The first four steps are the doctrine of Christ, which focuses on an individual’s walk and relationship with Christ. It is the means to be cleansed from sin and receive instruction from heaven as an individual. The next three steps address community growth and worship. To quote again from Denver’s *Zion Symposium* talk, the capstone of these seven steps is that:

“...there were [no] rich and [there were no] poor, [and there were no] bond and [there were no] free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift.”

The following is our experiment on the word and testimony of each of those seven steps.

First, faith. Just as the residue of believers came to the disciples Christ had chosen in 4th Nephi, we have learned that “Faith comes by hearing the word of God through the testimony of the servants of God.” The relationships that led to our fellowship forming began with individuals connecting over the words of the scriptures, the teachings of Joseph Smith, and of Denver Snuffer.

Joseph taught and we have “observe[d] that three things are necessary in order that [we] may exercise faith in God unto life and salvation. First, is to [have] the idea that he actually exists.” Alma says, “faith doesn’t mean having a perfect knowledge of things. Therefore, if you have faith, you hope for things beforehand, which you haven't yet received.” (Alma 16:26) It’s not required that you have a perfect understanding to begin on the path of exercising faith. Alma continues, “...But if you pay close attention and perform an experiment with my words, and start

with the smallest particle of faith – even if you can't do anything more than want to believe – hold on to this desire until you start to believe enough to trust my words a little.” (Alma 16:27)

In our fellowship, each individual is at a different level of understanding but shares the same desire to exercise faith and trust the Lord to teach us as one. When we began meeting with the intention of fellowshiping, we spent time sharing and learning what each of our goals were. We found that while each of us had diverse needs, we all shared a hope in the Covenant offered to us and desired to be gathered into a community of peace. With belief and hope, we could begin to walk the path together.

Joseph continued, “Secondly, [we must have] a correct idea of [God's] character, perfections, and attributes.” This understanding of God's nature has been developed over time as we have tried to “use the scriptures to correct [ourselves] and to guide [our] words, thoughts, and deeds.” Because each of us is at different levels of understanding regarding Christ's character and diverse “attributes” and “perfections,” the scriptures have been an essential foundation to help us each come to a mutual understanding of God's nature. Coupled with our lived experiences, the scriptures have allowed us, despite our differences in situation, to “...look forward with one eye, having one faith and one baptism, having [our] hearts bound together in unity and love toward one another” (Mosiah 9:9, brackets inserted by us for present day application).

The last thing required for faith is, “an actual knowledge that the course of life which [we are] pursuing is according to [God's] will... Without an acquaintance with these three facts, the faith of every [one of us] must be imperfect and unproductive, but with this understanding, it can become perfect and fruitful.” Obedience to the commandments in scripture coupled with fellowship prayer led us to understand that the path we are pursuing is in accordance with God's will.

Joseph Smith defined faith as a principle of power through action, in which one puts those beliefs into action and thereby acquires power. Because our goal is to become “one heart and one mind” and to one day live together in a peaceful community, this action is usually in the form of conforming our lives to the truths we are learning. Our group chat is filled with scriptures and ideas for personal improvement, coupled with friendly insight, questions, encouragement, follow-up, and sharing. In this way, we have been able to witness each other's daily walk, as we build bonds of friendship with the mutual aim of becoming a family filled with knowledge who keep the commandments.

The second actionable step in the 4th Nephi path is repentance. The Epistle of Jacob teaches us that sin occurs when one "knows to do good and does it not." (Ep. of Jacob 1:18.) In that light, 4th Nephi 1:1 states that each congregation truly repented of their sins, or in other words, fully

committed themselves to learning and choosing what is good. So, how do we learn what "good" is?

Alma 10:5 explains that after Alma and Amulek preached to the people, the people began to "repent and search the scriptures." It appears then that the place we are initially expected to learn what is good is the scriptures. Another testimony of this idea comes from T&C 82:20:

"And your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received, which vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation. And this condemnation rests upon the children of Zion, even all, and they shall remain under this condemnation until they **repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon, and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to say but to do according to that which I have written, that they may bring forth fruit meet for their Father's kingdom.** Otherwise, there remains a scourge and a judgment to be poured out upon the children of Zion, for shall the children of the kingdom pollute my holy land? Verily, verily I say unto you, nay."

Like the ancient Israelites who sought healing by looking to the Brazen Serpent, we also "look" to the Lord and His Word to shape our thoughts, conversations, and deeds in our search for healing. This "shaping" extends beyond just Sunday fellowship, but includes a daily, ongoing flow of ideas through phone and in-person meetings as often as we are able. Our daily conversations are a hopeful reflection of our desire to abandon error, accept greater increments of light, and foster mutual understanding in the pursuit of all things good.

Through trial, error, and mercy, we have learned and continue to learn to weigh our words before we give voice to them and consider each other's hearts so that they can be knit together in trust and unity. We have found that confession can further knit our hearts together. We have been wisely counseled to confess our faults to the Lord and one another so that we may be healed. If our heart desires to come unto Christ, the Lord is the One who requires that we first make reconciliation with our brothers and sisters (3 Nephi 5:25). Indeed, these things are inseparably connected.

Consider the conversion of Alma the Son of Alma. The reality of bringing his unresolved sins and iniquities - particularly those offenses towards others - into God's presence caused him to feel "inexpressible horror," even wanting to "cease all existence, both body and spirit" (Alma 17:3). Like Paul, once he had the scales removed from his eyes by the mercy of God, he immediately set out to repair the wrongs he had committed.

On the other hand, consider Judas's position when he failed to acknowledge his sins or make amends. He betrayed his Friend, the Lord, by concealing his iniquity while at the same time receiving the broken sacrament bread from Him, which is intended to strengthen and solidify relationships.

Though there are more than just these two examples, we can see that throughout history confession has the power to abate conspiracies among God's people.

Confession can be likened to a cold plunge: it's intimidating at first, but when you jump in, especially with a group of people you trust, you find a certain peace, calmness, and belonging. (T&C 90:5) It has positive effects on the body and mind. The Covenant of Christ likewise teaches that confession heals people, both in body and spirit. (Alma 10:14)

Confession robs the accuser of his power to accuse. When we confess our misdeeds to each other and are reconciled, we are able to interact with one another free of shame. This enables us to interact honestly and speak openly about our needs.

Our fellowship strives then to foster an environment where, if one needs to confess their faults or request support in their trials - and we do both - they can do so knowing they will find the support they need. We trust that if God guides someone to confession it is for the ultimate good.

We delight in believing the greatest manifestation of the glory of God is a changed life. God intends for us to bear one another's burdens, both temporal and spiritual. And what greater burdens do we carry than the injuries we have from one another? More than anything, confession has knit our hearts together as we have borne each other's spiritual burdens. When we confess, we, like Alma and the sons of Mosiah, allow the sins of the past to stand as a witness of God's mercy and grace for the repentant.

The third step in the 4th Nephi path is baptism. The first fruit, or outward gesture, of genuine repentance, is baptism or re-baptism. It's a signal to believers everywhere that we've covenanted to keep Christ's commandments in all things, in all places, and at all times for the rest of our lives. The scriptures teach us to repent of all our sins - not just *some* of our sins. Like this kind of repentance, baptism mirrors a fully dedicated heart by being an ordinance of immersion in living water. Moroni tells us that those in 4th Nephi:

"weren't baptized unless they produced suitable evidence that they were worthy of it. They didn't receive any for baptism unless they came forward with a broken heart and a contrite spirit and testified to the congregation that they had truly repented of all their sins. No one was received for baptism unless they took upon

themselves the name of Christ, having made up their minds to serve Him to the end.” (Moroni 6:1)

Some baptisms are private. Some are public. But they’re never performed alone. Traditionally, someone with authority from Jesus Christ performs the ordinance with their hand upon your back, as a symbol that the Lord (and we) also have your back as a brother or sister in the congregation of Christ. Together, we help one another overcome the appetites of the flesh, embrace the born-again process, and receive greater portions of God's light and truth while ascending to the station of Little Child.

We believe fellowships are designed so that we, as friends and family, can help smooth out the rough edges of our character, free of unrealistic expectations and demands. This stems from the commitment we made to the Lord and each other by baptism, and we have found joy as we’ve grown together in this way. Because baptism is a communal commitment, we joyfully lighten one another's burdens for the betterment of us all. The goal of the New Jerusalem, after all, is to have Christ in *our* midst, and baptism is the first community ritual to achieve this end.

The fourth step in the 4th Nephi path is receiving the Holy Ghost. The doctrine of Christ states:

“Anyone who believes in Me also believes in the Father, and the Father will testify to them of Me, since He will visit them with fire and with the Holy Ghost.”
(3 Nephi 5:9)

Anytime the Holy Ghost visits someone, even if it does not remain, that person has "received" the Holy Ghost. Once it becomes a constant companion, then that person has the gift of the Holy Ghost. The only requirements are a proper baptism and sincere, continual repentance. (Glossary: Gift of the Holy Ghost)

It's easy to question if you have received the Holy Ghost. We would imagine that all of us have struggled with this at some point, but we would point you all to examine the works and fruits of your life:

- Have you been baptized?
- Were you baptized because you desired to repent?
- Have you subsequently acquired further light and truth?
- Do you understand the scriptures to a degree you never have before?
- Are you being led to God or away from Him?

After Joseph and Oliver were baptized, they received the Holy Ghost in a manner that opened the scriptures unto them:

“Our minds being now enlightened, we began to have the **scriptures** laid open to our **understandings**, and the true meaning and intention of their more mysterious passages revealed unto us in a manner which we never could attain to previously, nor ever before had thought of.” (JSH 14:4.)

We would ask, is this something that you experience within your own fellowship? For us, this is the most common manifestation of the Holy Ghost. We rejoice in reading the scriptures and in coming together to discuss them. We call each other throughout the week to discuss new understandings of passages, things we've learned, or to ask questions about passages we've been pondering. There's a free exchange of light and information that is constantly flowing between us. Each person has their own scriptural gift or ability to see things from certain perspectives, and each helps clarify the meaning of scripture. We see each other as both teachers and students, no one relying solely on others for a portion of the Word. We all seek out and read the scriptures in our individual lives, and this is paramount to taking the scriptures as our daily guide.

The fifth step in the 4th Nephi path is having no conflicts or disputes among us. The Lord recently rebuked us, stating that “many things provoking arguments among the people are born from pride, stubbornness, aspiring for control, and reckless indifference toward and one another.” (Revelation to Denver Snuffer, 20 June 2024)

The scriptures equate covering our sins with gratifying our pride, our vain ambition, and further condemns the “exercise [of] control, or dominion, or compulsion, upon the souls of the children of men in any degree of unrighteousness” telling us that when we do so “the Heavens withdraw themselves, [and] the spirit of the Lord is grieved” (T&C 139:5). So, then, it necessarily follows that to prevent gratifying our pride, we must be willing to UN-cover our mistakes as a means of bringing humility, and preventing other things which “[provoke] arguments among [us]”. The Lord even requires that we reconcile with a brother or sister we have injured before he will allow us to come to Him (3 Ne 5:25).

We are warned in the sermon at Bountiful that we must “accept accountability for our misconduct the instant it’s brought to [our] attention, to avoid leaving this life unrepentant and risking condemnation.” (3 Ne 5:26).

Humbling ourselves before our brothers and sisters, admitting when we are wrong, and reconciling together are not optional if there are to be no conflicts or disputes among us. We know that this is true, and while it can seem intimidating we have always found that, when approached correctly, people are far more merciful than we expect them to be. The peace of a clear conscience and unified friendship is infinitely preferable to the guilt, shame, and resentments that divide us from one another.

The example from 4th Nephi does not speak to conflict resolution, rather it describes a state where the spirit of conflict was eradicated from among the congregation. This principle has worked among us in the same way. We proactively prevent conflicts among us through understanding and connection rather than reactively solving disputes. Christ taught:

“You must not argue about this as you’ve done before, and you must not argue about the points of My doctrine either, as you’ve done before. In truth I tell you: Anyone who welcomes the spirit of conflict doesn’t follow Me, but is following the accuser, who’s the father of conflict. He incites people to angrily fight with each other. This isn’t My doctrine, to incite angry fighting by people. But this is My doctrine, everything like that should end.” (3 Nephi 5:8)

When we obey the Lord’s command to forgive all people and reject the spirit of conflict, then a brother or sister who comes to us to reconcile will bring peace to our hearts and allow us to know the joy of our Master (T&C 157:51).

4th Nephi 1:1 goes on to say “Everyone dealt fairly and honestly with each other.” The covenant scriptures frequently teach that we must hold ourselves to a high standard of justice while extending mercy to others. Dealing fairly and honestly with each other is a requirement of living in Zion. In the Answer to Prayer for Covenant (T&C 157), the Lord emphasizes that we should focus on judging ourselves with a sense of responsibility and justice, correcting our own shortcomings, and holding ourselves accountable. This personal accountability is essential for growth, repentance, and maintaining integrity before God and our fellow man.

In the *Zion Symposium* talk, Denver expanded on what it means to deal justly. He said:

“You don’t have to give me mercy, because I’m going to give YOU justice. I’m going to be tougher on myself. It is fair that I do this for you... the standard by which they are evaluating their conduct internal to themselves is the more difficult standard. They’re going to deal justly with one another. I will break my heart, I will break my wallet, I will break my life before I will not deal justly with you and give you everything that you’re entitled to.”

So, dealing justly means honoring our word. It means paying our debts. It means giving everyone, including Babylon, what we owe them. When we do this, we build trust with our fellow man, with Babylon, and with God. The residents of Zion will deal fairly and honestly with each other.

On the other hand, the Lord highlights the importance of mercy when dealing with others. In T&C 157:50 the Lord states, “I descended below it all, and know the sorrows of you all, and have borne the grief of it all, and I say to you, Forgive one another.” The Lord knows the full

weight of justice. He knows what suffering awaits us if we demand justice of others. He tells us, “They must suffer even as I, which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, to suffer both body and spirit, and would that I might not drink the bitter cup and shrink.” When we apply mercy to others and cast a cloak of charity over their shortcomings, we merit mercy for ourselves. “And God loves the merciful, for they will obtain mercy.” (3 Nephi 5:16)

Throughout Christ’s ministry, he readily forgave and showed compassion to even the most flawed individuals. As recipients of His divine mercy, we are commanded to extend mercy to others.

Just as we are to apply mercy to others, we are to apply justice to ourselves. By applying justice to ourselves, we remain humble and aware of our need for repentance. And by extending mercy to others, we allow love, understanding, and grace to govern our relationships, fostering a spirit of unity and compassion. This spirit, when nurtured, will turn a fellowship of unlikely friends into a family. Jacob teaches us that we ought to, “Care for those around [us] like [we] care for [ourselves] and treat everyone like family and be generous with [our] money and possessions, so they can prosper like [us].” (brackets inserted by us for present day appreciation.)

Our own fellowship began this way. Each of us comes from a unique background, with unique challenges, gifts, and understandings. We are an eclectic group of imperfect individuals trying to find our way home to God. Despite a universal desire to search for and accept the Lord’s revealed truths found in covenant scriptures, each of us has come up short. Without exception, at some point every one of us has erred in understanding, let down another, failed to properly measure our words, or fallen short of loving one another as the Lord has loved us. Yet, despite apparent failure, a united commitment to holding ourselves strictly accountable, while offering mercy and understanding to others, has allowed a committed group of believers to find friendship and fellowship where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

As a fellowship, we can testify to the fruits of dealing fairly and honestly with each other. As we exact justice upon ourselves, we invite mercy in to restore the balance. We build a foundation of trust that allows a spirit of love and unity to grow.

As with all things, the Lord set the perfect example. As we follow the pattern set by the Savior, who dealt with others mercifully while fulfilling justice through His own perfect example, we will find harmony in our fellowships.

The harmony we are searching for is exemplified by the people in 4th Nephi who, “. . . had all things in common, so there weren’t any rich or poor people, enslaved or free people, but they were all given their freedom and allowed to share in the heavenly gift.”

This is the seventh and final step in the 4th Nephi path. For us, this has required a lot of patience, diligence, wisdom, and care to be taken so that we do not run faster than we have strength.

We are advised that when we desire to administer relief to the poor, we need to exercise wisdom. King Benjamin instructed:

In light of the things I've told you - to maintain a remission of your sins daily and to walk guiltless before God, it's important to share your belongings with the poor. Each person should give based on what they have, by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, and providing spiritual and temporal relief **according to their circumstances. See that all these things are done with patience and wisdom. No one is required to work beyond their capacity. Diligent efforts can lead to success. Therefore live your life thoughtfully, being mindful of order and diligence.** (Mosiah 2:6)

We believe tithing is the prescribed means whereby a people can begin to have “all things in common”. There is a wise order described in the scriptures and words of God’s servants regarding tithing, which we are attempting to adhere to. Giving is done by those with abundance, not by the poor. Abundance is defined in T&C 173:1 as what is left over after *all* household needs are taken care of. It states:

“Tithing was always to be taken from surplus (meaning unnecessary excess property) and increase (meaning what remains after all costs of the household have been paid). It was to be drawn out of the abundance in the possession of the giver so that there may be enough and to spare, not from property required for their necessities.”

When all of a family’s household needs are fulfilled, they are then qualified to administer relief to the “poor”, whose household needs are not yet met. We have been instructed that tithes are to go primarily to the “poor” (T&C 173:1). We have a definition for poor, by being told *what* tithes are used for:

“Help provide for those who need housing, food, clothing, healthcare, education, and transportation, or children that need care. Take the money the Lord intended for the poor and administer it for the poor.” (T&C 175:42)

And:

“...giving of funds to help them defray their indebtedness, answering their medical needs; Those are the kinds of things that knit hearts together.” (*Authority*,

Keys and Kingdom, Denver Snuffer 2019)

Again, in the *Zion Symposium* talk Denver made this comment:

“Would you like to see Zion being practiced right this minute? I don’t care where you go in the world, you can find it **inside the family**. That’s the little microcosm of Heaven... And the family is the place where—if we don’t find it anywhere else—we will find the presence of Zion, even in the hovels of third-world countries.”

Denver continues by saying that:

“...As a consequence of the way in which they were living, “The Lord did prosper them exceedingly in the land...insomuch that they did build cities again, where there had been cities burned.”

Because of what has been explained in the foregoing steps, we’ve had our hearts knit together in love and unity. In other words, we are learning to become family.

As we previously referenced, Jacob 2:5 in the Covenant of Christ tells us to:

“Care for those around you like you care for yourselves, and treat everyone **like family** and be generous with your money and possessions, so they can prosper like you.”

Because of this, caring for each other using tithing is a natural desire and extension of our relationship.

When all the needs of the poor in our fellowship are taken care of, we then hope to donate to land and temple needs. Because our fellowship plans to gather on land together and build a community with each other one day, our understanding of tithing is influenced by that as the end goal. Gathering together will require us to pay Babylon before she allows us to go in peace.

Denver stated in his 2017 talk *Things to Keep Us Awake at Night*:

“Fleeing Babylon will require us to part ways with her. Our departure will require Babylon to be paid. We will have to ‘render unto Caesar the things that are Caesars’ before Babylon will allow us to depart in peace. Honoring, obeying and sustaining the law require that land used for a Zion Community must be acquired

through legal purchase. People can't just take what they need. Property needs to be acquired in the way the law will respect and no one can challenge our right to occupy and use the land. For Zion, land must be redeemed in the way the Lord has instructed:

“let all the churches [or in our day, fellowships] gather together all their moneys. Let these things be done in their time, lo, not in haste, and observe to have all things prepared before you. And let honorable men be appointed, even wise men, and send them to purchase the lands. And every [fellowship]... when they are built up, if they will hearken unto this counsel they may buy lands and gather together upon them, and in this way they may establish Zion. There is even now already in store sufficient, yea, even abundance, to redeem Zion and establish her waste places, no more to be thrown down.”³ (brackets inserted by us for present day application.)

We are told that “Nevertheless, in your temporal things you shall be equal in all things, and this not grudgingly; otherwise, the abundance of the manifestations of the spirit shall be withheld.” (T&C 61:4) When the fellowships have no rich or poor among them and are able to donate their abundance to the purchasing of land and building of a temple, then all will be able to partake in the Heavenly Gift that flows from it.

The Glossary entry for “Heavenly Gift” tells us it is:

“An offer made directly from the Lord, often through a new gospel dispensation, with Heaven’s intent to bestow the fullness of the gospel and priesthood upon a generation. This fullness includes an expanding scriptural canon, revelation, Heavenly visitors, and prophetic power, as well as all blessings and sealing power necessary for fullness of salvation and exaltation. It has been offered by the Lord more often than it has been welcomed and accepted by mankind. This is reflected in the Lord’s lament, O ye people...of the house of Israel, how oft have I gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings and have nourished you. And again, how oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, yea, O ye people of the house of Israel who have fallen. Yea, O ye people of the house of Israel, ye that dwell at Jerusalem as ye that have fallen, yea, how oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens and ye would not. O ye house of Israel whom I have spared, how oft will I gather you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings if ye will repent and return unto me with full purpose of heart. But if not, O house of Israel, the places of your dwellings shall become desolate until the time of the fulfilling of the covenant to

³ Denver used the word “churches,” where we have substituted “fellowships” for our day.

your fathers (3 Nephi 4:9). The Lord's offer can only be accepted on the condition of obedience and faith. When the fullness is accepted, people live in peace and happiness: And they had all things common among them; therefore, there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free and partakers of the Heavenly gift (4 Nephi 1:1). He has shewn himself unto the world, and glorified the name of the Father, and prepared a way that thereby others might be partakers of the Heavenly gift (Ether 5:2). When the fullness is refused (by mankind not complying with the conditions of the covenant), the opportunity to establish a Heavenly order and Zion is lost."

This "fullness of the gospel and priesthood" and the associated blessings can only be had in a temple accepted by God (T&C 141:10).

We testify that the foregoing principles can take hardened and wayward people and help them become a family. We have a firm hope that enduring in these principles will lead to our budding family gathering to a place of peace and safety, "where the Lord call[s] his people Zion because they [are] of one heart, and of one mind, and [dwell] in righteousness, and there [are] no poor among them." And we encourage all to experiment on the words of Christ, to obtain like testimonies for themselves.

The concepts in this talk are not new. But we hope that contextualizing them helps to show the bigger picture of what God is trying to accomplish in our day.

In closing, any of the words spoken today that are true are the Lord's, and any errors are our own. We believe the steps in 4th Nephi describe the path laid out for us to obtain a new heart. All of the principles we have experimented upon can be boiled down succinctly to Christ's own conclusion:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 10:23.)

Amen.