

**ANSWER:
BUILD A HOUSE**

You ask on behalf of my people and therefore I answer my people. Hear, therefore, my words:

What have you learned?

What ought you to have learned?

Consider this:

A master called his servants and told them, I send you to a far off land where there is no stone and command you to there build me a house. When you are done, send me word and I will come there to dwell.

All his servants were faithful to their master and obeyed. Some reasoned among themselves that their master dwelt in a stone house, and because this far off land had no stone they ought gather and take stone with them.

Others reasoned among themselves that because the master said there was no stone there must be trees, and therefore brought axes and tools to build a wooden house.

And yet others reasoned among themselves that they should go and see the place their master had chosen not knowing beforehand what would be there.

The first group gathered stones as they traveled with great difficulty in their chosen labor.

The second group went with haste to the place, but found no trees with which to build a wooden house and their tools were of no use. Their plans having failed, they remembered their fellow servants who gathered stones for a stone house and returned to join their labor.

Returning, they met the group planning only to go to the place and do as their master commanded. Those returning said, We have seen the place. There is no stone and no trees there with which to build a house. We return to help gather stones. Come with us.

Those going replied, Not so. We will see for ourselves the place the master has chosen and then obey his command.

Those returning said, You are foolish for the master said, There is no stone there, and therefore must want us to bring stone.

The servants departed, one to see the site chosen by the master, and the other to join those gathering stone.

When the servants arrived at the site, they too saw there was no stone for a stone house neither was there wood for a wooden house. They pondered why their master should choose such a place for his house. Looking about they saw the place was high and lifted up, as if the whole world could be seen from the wondrous place. An approaching enemy could be spied from a long distance. They said, Surely the master has chosen a place of safety, peace and beauty. Our master was wise in choosing this spot. He must also have been wise in commanding we build here his house. What are we to do? Ought we also labor to bring the distant stone?

But among these servants some began to prepare the ground, clearing a place to build the house. As they moved away the grass and brush, they found there was

clay suitable to make bricks with which to build a house. They told their companions, See, there is clay here. Let us make bricks and build the master a house from what we have found here on his chosen spot. And so they made bricks, laboring, digging, shaping, and drying. These servants reasoned among themselves that the labor would be better done if their fellow servants joined them. They sent messengers to those laboring to bring stone.

The messengers told their weary, fellow servants now moving a great mound of rock that while they were still distant from the place chosen by their master, work on his house had begun. They said, Come now quickly with us, for we have found clay to make bricks at the place the master has chosen, and with you we can accomplish what the master commanded. Many were willing, and some were offended, and some wanted to stop all effort and return to their master and tell him his command was too great. They argued among themselves, and for a moment forgot their master's command, and forgot those who were laboring to make bricks from clay at the place the master had chosen.

After a season of quarreling and disputing, some said, We have neglected our master's command long enough. We go to help make bricks of clay to build our master's house at the place he has commanded. Seeing some depart, those who remained called for all to reason together because the labor was hard and the loss of even a few made moving stones even more difficult.

Soon, many others went to join in making bricks. A few others returned to complain to the master. Another few continued to move the stones with little hope to complete their labor to build their master a stone house such as he had before.

When the house of brick was complete, all the servants returned to tell their master as they were commanded. Returning, they came upon the place where those few remained faithfully moving stone. Many had compassion on their fellow servants and began a new labor with them. A messenger was sent to tell the master his house was finished.

Those who had compassion said, The master's house is finished. What need is there for further labor to carry stone for the house? Let us not waste the effort of our fellow servants who have labored hardest, and we will put the stones to good use.

Hearing the work was complete, the master with his household, departed for the new house. On the way they found the pathway improved by stones laid to pave the way. The master was pleased and said, I asked you build a house at the spot I had chosen and this you have now faithfully done. But you have also made a stone road in place of the old pathway to a place where there is no stone to use. Well done my faithful servants, for all of you have labored to do as I have commanded, and proven your faithfulness.

I will accept the house and the road, that none of your labor be lost.

I ask again, What have you learned?
What ought you to have learned?

I say to you that there is need for but one house, and I accept the statement you have adopted and approve it as your statement to be added.

But I say again, there was honor in the labor of others. Whereas I look upon the heart and see faithful service, many among you do not look at, nor see, nor value what I the Lord love in the hearts of my people. As I have said before, I say again, Love one another, labor willingly alongside each other. Learn what you ought, and when I ask you to labor, do so wisely even if you know not beforehand what you will find. I do not ask what you cannot do. Trust my words and proceed always in faith, believing that with me all things are possible. All who have been faithful are mine.

MY INITIAL INTERPRETATION:

I have been trying to understand the answer received regarding the Guide and Standard. There are many ways to understand a parable. This is my initial understanding of the more obvious meanings in the Lord's answer.

The Lord has previously declared that He "reproves and corrects, and forgives and forgets" (see T&C 157:58)—and I think this answer is clearly reproof.

Twice this answer asks two questions: "What have you learned? What ought you to have learned?" There is no need to ask two questions unless there is a different answer to what we have learned and what we "ought" to have learned. I have searched the answer to try to understand what we "ought" to have learned. This would naturally be the more important lesson.

The "house" to be built is at a "distant spot" of ground. This suggests that the place is not where we are. It requires that we go a great distance to get where the master wants us; in other words, we must change. Change is the essence of repentance.

The word "house" in the parable is a symbol of family and unity. A house is a place for a family to dwell. The people given the command are called "servants" and are not yet members of the master's household. They are sent to build a "house" in order to change them through the labor. The labor is intended to be unifying and uplifting. It might have transformed the laborers.

From the outset, the master's servants are not unified. Throughout the parable, they remain in separate groups in all they do. There is no time at which all of them work together to complete the "house" for their master.

The first step the servants take in response to the command is to divide into separate groups. Each of these groups completely disagree with the others about how to obey their master. Failing to reach an agreement, they proceed separately in an attempt to obey their master.

One group assumes the master's reference to missing "stone," together with the stone house occupied by the master, should be understood to mean only a new stone house would be acceptable. There was nothing explicitly stated by the master to justify this understanding. He never said a stone house should be built. That assumption by these servants then drove everything they subsequently do. A few of them never work on the master's house. But having concluded this, they undertake the hardest labor in the parable.

It is as if the servants never consider how important their unified effort is to accomplish what their master commanded. Even through the end of the parable, they remain divided in their zeal to obey their master.

The place the servants are sent was “high and lifted up” and was selected as “a place of safety, peace and beauty” better than any other place the servants had seen before. Since the parable is given to explain how the Lord sees the effort of His people to prepare a Guide and Standard, that effort was intended to be the place that is high and lifted up. The labor was intended to produce a place of safety, peace and beauty. It was to be an act that would transform and change the servants. It was intended to raise them up; to unify them and give them the kind of blessing that comes from changing the role of servant to the role of household member. Laboring with one another was an opportunity for these servants to perhaps see and learn from the commandment.

The servants are fixated on getting a job done. They never contemplate the job is incidental to taking them to a new and distant place. They never consider that their master wants them to be high, lifted up, in a place of safety, peace and beauty rarely found in this contentious and divided world.

The “stone” is the “hard labor” a few servants undertake. In gospel terms Christ is the “rock” upon which salvation is to be built (NC Hel. 2:17). Christ has declared His doctrine (NC 3 Nephi 5:9). Christ has declared His law in the Sermon on the Mount (NC Matt. 3) and Sermon at Bountiful (NC 3 Ne. 5:10-6:6). This is the hardest work of all. But it is intended to be, and in the parable finally does serve as, the sure and solid pathway that leads to the chosen place. In the parable those who labor the hardest with the stone do not reach the place that was high and lifted up. Yet they pave the pathway to get there. The master singles out the stone pathway for praise.

The chosen place is intended to take the servants, by their labor, to somewhere far from where they are now. A place of safety, peace and beauty high and lifted up is far from from the worldly, the carnal and the mocker. The place is for those who are governed by the love of God that Christ’s doctrine and law are intended to instill in the heart of those who arrive there. Paul described it, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. Against such there is no law. And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.” (NC Gal. 1:22.) Against such there is no law—meaning that there is no judging them by any standard because they are filled by the Spirit and unified in love. The “law,” including Christ’s law, is intended as the path to transform an individual by the love of God and their fellow man. In the parable the stone pathway becomes the stable way to arrive at the promised place of safety, peace and beauty.

Every one of the servants in the parable is faithful to the master. Their faithfulness pleased the master, and received his commendation. But the parable uses the word “ought” three times: Twice in posing the question, “what ought you to have learned?” The third time the word is used in the answer to that question: “As I have said before, I say again, Love one another, labor willingly alongside each other.

Learn what you ought, and when I ask you to labor, do so wisely even if you know not beforehand what you will find. I do not ask what you cannot do.” This is the reproof we have earned. This is the correction we need. This is what we are supposed to have learned by this opportunity. The commandment to prepare a Guide and Standard was always for our sake. We needed the experience.

The task was intended to unify and uplift everyone. The command was to go to a distant place, where few have gone. That place is where servants transform into a household by building a house for their master. The “house” to be built is the people themselves. We are the temple of God. (NC 1 Cor. 1:12.) The servants were to be reshaped by the labor, remolded like clay into people worthy for the Heavenly Master to dwell within.

Everyone involved received favorable recognition from the Lord for their faithfulness, but that is not what “ought” to have been learned. We have been reproved.

The Guide and Standard we built is approved. As the answer states, “there is need for but one house” and therefore the Lord will accept the statement that has been nearly unanimously adopted. But this approval is not coupled with an endorsement of the project as the Lord’s. His acceptance is only to “approve it as your statement to be added” but stops short of being “His statement.”

Many people have felt God’s approval of their part in the labor. He is obviously pleased by all the faithfulness of all the servants. But the work was intended as a cooperative learning project. This was not just an opportunity to accomplish a written statement, but was a chance to work together and learn how to lovingly engage in joint effort.

God is determined to labor with us as His people. That does not guarantee we will become what He wants us to become. To transform into people He can come to dwell among, we must learn what we “ought” to understand. Because He is laboring with us, we may become worthy of saving at the time of harvest. (See NC Jacob 3:28.) Our work is what the allegory of the vineyard in Jacob looks like when the Lord of the vineyard labors with His servants a last time.

He will “reprove and correct, and forgive and forget” as He explained in T&C 157:58:

“There remains great work yet to be done. Receive my covenant and abide in it, not as in the former time when jarring, jealousy, contention and backbiting caused anger, broke hearts and hardened the souls of those claiming to be my saints. But receive it in spirit, in meekness and in truth. I have given you a former commandment that I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men. And again, I have taught that if you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Heavenly Father forgive your trespasses. How do I act toward mankind? If men intend no offense, I take no offense, but if they are taught and should have obeyed, then I reprove and correct, and forgive and forget. You cannot be at peace with one another if you take offense when none is intended. But again

I say, Judge not others except by the rule you want used to weigh yourself.”

He told us this at the time He offered us His covenant. Becoming this is the distant place that is high and lifted up. This is what we “ought” to have learned. This is who God wants His people to be.

The idea of becoming “one” as a group is easy to say, but hard to do. Everyone can explain the idea. In our minds the idea is easy. It is learning how to implement unity and agreement without bullying, arguing, manipulating or condemning others who differ that seems so hard for us.

We are a small group of people now directly confronting the challenge of becoming of one heart, one mind, with no poor among us. We only know of this having been successfully accomplished twice in history, and neither of those communities left a blueprint to follow. Because godly oneness does not exist among any people today, and there is no blueprint to follow, the Lord of the vineyard is providing us with learning opportunities.

The challenge to prepare a Guide and Standard was not just an exercise for our minds, but also a chance to discipline our hearts while laboring alongside one another. We got our minds into enough of an agreement to have a document that was overwhelmingly accepted by a vote. And we have the Lord’s reaction to it.

Fellowships are designed to change hearts and bring unity to a group. The way our tithing is handled is designed to change hearts. Every opportunity that has been given is designed by the Perfect Teacher to teach us how to become what we are not yet. It is clear the Lord does not expect us to be perfect now, but intends to guide our growth.

In a very real sense we have never failed the Lord. Opportunities have been given to experience growth by Divine direction, and people have then risen to face the challenge, gaining valuable experience and learning through the Lord’s patient tutoring.

Because we are the only people who are laboring to fulfill a new covenant with God, we will grow increasingly unified and also increasingly different from the world. Societies seem unified because they submit to governmental, educational or religious control. We seem divided because we are led by God and accountable to one another. Other people have the veneer of unity. We have no veneer. God wants our weaknesses to be exposed fully to public view. He wants us to learn and accomplish real unity, not the imitation of it we see in the world. People unified by power, influence, control and compulsion belong only to the Devil. Those are his tools. God has made us free, and therefore only we can freely choose unity, peace, love and safety. As Christ declared, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you — not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (NC John 9:9.) The world’s unity will disintegrate. Unity through God will endure.

God presides over us. No one of us is in control. The Guide and Standard labor was equally borne by every individual. Fellowships are equal. Tithing is gathered and distributed by the contributors directly. We are all on the same footing. This provides us with essential preparation for the coming Zion.

We have proven to God and ourselves that we cannot dwell together in peace yet. The parable states it well, "After a season of quarreling and disputing" we came to our senses about our neglect, but then divided company again to work separate from each other. Even so, the Lord has commended our faithfulness in laboring to accomplish the work.

There is more growth needed before we can see Zion. I do not expect quarreling and disputing people, even if they are the Lord's, will be permitted to build His House and become a part of His Household. Thankfully the Lord entrusts His people with labor to perform. He designs work to prepare us for His purpose.

God is the Great Teacher, and that means He can do great things even with poor pupils. As He concluded this answer, "Trust my words and proceed always in faith, believing that with me all things are possible."

There are many other lessons in the parable. These are only some of the most obvious.