

Commend Yourself to God

Commentary on the Nature of Change

Prologue

This is a book about manipulation. By that I mean, "to influence, or play upon another, by devious means, for one's own advantage." It is a practice common to our society and all too common among members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Most of us are a bit sensitive to being manipulated. Few of us are sensitive to the fact that we too are manipulators. Manipulation is of the devil and is central to his initial plan as well as his current attempts to destroy us. To the degree that we practice manipulation we are, whether deliberately or inadvertently, serving the father of lies and contributing to the destruction of our fellow travelers. It will take some courage and self examination on your part if you are to proceed, with me, into the examples that follow. I think you will be painfully surprised at what you might discover. Fear not, you are in good company. The discovery of the subtle and insidious ways in which I have practiced manipulation was very dismaying. On the flip side, the discovery of what can happen when manipulation is avoided in my relationships with others has been magnificent beyond belief.

My education has been more like that of the Donner Party; too risky and dangerous to recommend to those who might wish to pursue the curriculum. It started out with an educational short cut, a whole lot of misinformation and just plain lazy foolishness. I wouldn't recommend it to anyone, but you might enjoy being a fly on the wall observing some of those adventures to see what, if anything, I've learned. If you'd rather take the chance of discovering these things for yourself, go right ahead. I made it through. But, I know several who have not. My success cannot be attributed to any quality of skill or resilience on my part. Neither, can it be said that I had somehow deserved to survive such a dangerous course.

While I could have saved myself a whole lot of heartache; and while I most certainly caused pain and hardship for many, as I careened from train wreck to train wreck; I harbor no regrets. So valuable has been this education and so priceless the results, that I would be utterly ungrateful were I to wish it had been otherwise. I have had to make amends to so many in the wake of my insanity, but have yet to have anyone be unwilling to forgive. Of course that fact is a reflection on the quality of their character, not mine.

This is not my story alone, but also that of all my compatriots in error. We've grown out of affliction together and mine can never be an isolated story disconnected from the stories of the others. These are stories of redemption, discovery, miracles and majesty, because they all involved coming unto Christ. Most of us would tell you, that our affliction was the catalyst that at last stimulated a reliance on the Atonement and that we likely wouldn't have come unto Christ in any other way. We were too full of pride to think we needed a Savior until our choices made turning to Him our only remaining option.

I originally set out to write this book to be published and sold. I soon discovered that I was watering it down in an effort to make it more sellable. As this is a book about manipulation and as the watering down of the work would be manipulative, I decided not to publish a bound edition. You can read it here in its entirety, for free. You may also quote from it or use it in any fashion so long as you cite your source. Now, please don't expect this work to be doom and gloom. On the contrary it is all about the Good News that is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Good news that in my case 55 years of church activity failed to teach me. I'm not blaming the church, nor my parents and teachers for this. I'm blaming pride. You may discover a whole new perspective on pride in these pages. Turn the page and see...

Chapter 1 - For Pity's Sake

I started out convinced that I was a failure. All I wanted, as a boy, was to grow up to be like my dad. He was such a hero in my eyes and could do no wrong. He was a marvelous athlete and a brilliant speaker and teacher. He was so good to my mother. He had so many friends.

I, on the other hand, didn't have an athletic bone in my body. I was always picked last, when choosing up sides. "I threw like a girl."^[1] I had no interest in humiliation or pain. I felt like a constant disappointment to my father because I sensed very early that he'd have loved to have had me grow up to be just like him. In fact he often said, "Son, if you don't turn out better than me, you won't be as good." I think he meant that given the advantages he provided me; advantages he hadn't had, I had a head start on excelling in sports and in life. He expected me to take full advantage of that head start.

Gifted with a vivid imagination, I developed the habit of dreaming up some wonderful thing I would do to impress my Dad. I quickly discovered that in his mind it had to be in some aspect of athletics. He seemed blind to my extreme lack of potential. I tried several other ventures. Most of them failed too. I didn't like

failure. I didn't like disappointing my father. I didn't like rejection from my peers and before long, I didn't like me.

At the age of ten I had my first full blown pity party. I didn't like being me and I found something that made me feel better which helped me forget about my discomfort with myself and situation. Within weeks I became an addict. I couldn't live without a fix. It was the only thing I could rely on to make me feel different. It never rejected, criticized or ostracized me. All I knew was that I didn't like how I felt normally and that using made that all go away for a while.

I'm not going to go into what I was addicted to for the same reason Paul didn't identify his "thorn in the flesh[2]." The fact that we don't know the details of the Apostle's affliction opens the way for anyone who has an affliction to identify with his circumstances. Had he specifically identified it, those with dissimilar afflictions might not have understood that his experience applied to their situations as well. The bottom line is: If you have ever been uncomfortable with the way you felt and have used some external means of changing how you felt; and if you have ever had a pity party in which, feeling sorry for yourself, you justified using something extrinsic to make you feel better; you are, to a degree at least, in the same boat as I.

Let me offer a short list of ways in which we unhealthily manipulate our moods in artificial ways: Alcohol, tobacco, stimulants, drugs, narcotics, sugar, comfort food, pornography, sex, gambling, solitaire, television, internet surfing, shopping, spending, shop lifting and *manipulation*.... The list could be nearly infinite. I knew a dear Sister who became addicted to Genealogy. That was her go-to thing whenever she couldn't face her life's discomfort. Eventually, it became so bad that she would neglect her house and family, miss meals, stay up at all hours of the night, and beg others for names she could research. She finally admitted she had a problem when she found herself waking up neighbors in the middle of the night begging for a new name to prepare for Temple work. She would copy names from other people's lines when they weren't looking and secretly stash them, in case she needed one on a day when she'd hit a dead end on her own lines. She was no different than a prescription drug addict stealing drugs from someone's medicine cabinet, except it wasn't illegal, just unethical.

The first symptom is a pity party. My pity parties became more and more elaborate, frequent and intense. They became the focus of my life. I could barely make it from one to the next. I probably should have made a business of hosting them for others, after all I had all the decorations and party favors any one would ever need. Fortunately, I never became a dealer; drugs or Tupperware. The bottom line, when it comes to pity parties, is pride. That's right. We all tend to want life on our own terms. Then, when things don't go our way, it's the most

natural thing in the world to feel sorry for ourselves. Were we to be humble, we'd be more willing to accept life on God's terms and spend our efforts in the productive venture of learning from our circumstances.

Perhaps you've never made that connection. Perhaps you are like me. Perhaps you got jilted by the boy of your dreams and then holed up in your room with a package of cookies and a quart of ice cream. Maybe you're the missionary who got a door slammed in his face and couldn't get himself out of bed on time for the next several weeks. Or, possibly you're the one who came home with a bad report card, got in a fight with your mom and then ran away. Yup, running away counts too, because it's the same thing. The alcoholic runs away to the bottle, the obese person runs away to a package of Twinkies and the porn addict runs away to the internet.

I was sharing this stuff with a friend one time and he began to wonder if he was addicted to playing solitaire. I asked him, "Have you ever quickly shut it down when your wife walked into the room?" He admitted he had.

"So, you're ashamed of the time you spend at it and would rather keep that a secret?"

"Yes."

"Have you tried to quit?"

"No."

"Will you quit for a week and report back to me?"

"Okay," was his timid reply. He made it a half a day. And admitted he was hooked. He was playing solitaire for the same reason the alcoholic drinks. He was miserable in some way and was looking for a quick easy distraction to give him relief.

I bring up some of these examples to point out that addiction is more common than most of us think. We are surprised because we've always identified addiction with illegal drugs and alcohol. My solitaire playing friend was Senior High Councilman in his Southern Utah Stake. Now, I'll be the first to admit that wasting our lives away playing solitaire is not nearly so life threatening as wasting them away using Meth (and not nearly so hard to quit) but it is still a waste. Addictive behavior, in my view, occurs when we use extrinsic means to treat intrinsic problems.

Hyrum W. Smith wrote a wonderful book called *Pain is Inevitable Misery is Optional*. I highly recommend the book. The title is spot on. We all experience pain. It is part and parcel of mortality. Misery follows pain when not properly treated. It is like a man who suffers a broken leg and so takes up a crutch to facilitate mobility. As long as he puts no weight on the leg he gets along pretty well. He thinks it's just a temporary situation but before long he's used to the crutch. Now suppose he decides the crutch is cumbersome, even disgusting and decides to throw it away. Suddenly, he realizes the leg has not healed and immobilized, he must take up the crutch again. So it is with addictive behavior. It is the crutch that we've chosen to help us deal with the pain. Disgusted, we toss the behavior away time after time,

only to take it back again in order to cope with the pain while we continue to try to function. Would it not be better to heal the leg? Once we are healed of the discomfort we can easily toss the crutch.

For me, the pain was due to pride. I had spent my life insisting upon having life on my own terms. We don't get life on our terms. This is an important thing to discover. We once accepted life on God's terms; which was a condition of our being able to experience mortality. But Satan entered the picture very early in our lives and effectively persuaded us to seek our own comfort and selfish advantage and that always turns to disappointment, discouragement, sin and misery. In making that initial choice, to accept God's terms, we understood we were taking a risk. We most certainly were informed that having the right to make choices meant that others would too. We understood that inevitably we, and others, would make wrong choices that would wound us. We accepted the risk because we accepted the promise of the Savior who would not only deliver us, but heal our wounds and carry our burdens. We also knew that the key to receiving that healing balm would be humility.

The Sunday School answer to the question, "What is Humility?" has always been, "to be teachable." This is true, but to my mind, it is a pretty thin definition. The discovery that humility might more effectively defined as, "acknowledging my utter and entire dependence upon God for everything I require to be happy," changes everything. Implicit in this definition is a willingness to accept life on God's terms. His terms are wonderful and, seen with clarity, far more attractive than our own Satan inculcated (he inspires no one) terms. For Christ invites us to change our hearts that He might heal us[3].

The balance of this book will be focused upon that objective; finding joy through humility. We will learn to let go of our pride and will cancel all of our pity parties for we will no longer have cause to feel sorry for ourselves no matter what challenges and difficulties we might be called upon to face.

Chapter 2 – For Hell's Sake

I have spent the past six years serving as a volunteer at the local Juvenile Detention Center. One day, in what they call a "clergy visit," I was spending time with a young offender who had committed a particularly heinous crime. Fortunately, his victim had suffered no serious effects from the crime, but certainly might have. The young man was very distraught by the predicament he was in.

He turned to me in tears and asked, "Am I going to Hell?"

I replied, "My dear friend, aren't you already there?"

He wept and told me, "I've been there most of my life."

He told me of a horrendous childhood of abuse and neglect. The wounds he'd suffered were still open and raw. Much of his misbehavior came as a result of trying to cope with all that pain and terror. I explained to my young friend that the misery he was in was a result of the poor choices he'd made while trying to find a way to cope with his pain. Remember, Satan desires we might become as miserable as he is[4]. There is nothing Satan would rather see than someone treating the symptoms rather than the causes of their pain. Treating the symptoms leads to a frantic search for an anesthetic, if you will, and masking the pain only leads to further complications with the root problem. Pain is unpleasant and can be humbling, but misery is Hell.

My young friend was keenly interested in this. He could easily see the connection between misery and the hell he was experiencing in his young, troubled life. What a joy it was to tell him of a way to heal the pain so he no longer needed to take drugs and participate in other misbehavior in order to artificially deal with it. I've thought a lot about hell since that day. I strongly suspect that the difference between hell on earth and hell in Spirit Prison is pretty simple. In both places we experience pain. But in mortality we have myriad methods by which we can anesthetize the pain. Primarily we are speaking of spiritual and emotional pain here, but physical pain comes into play as well. The problem is that the anesthetic response just turns our pain into misery. After this life, when we have lost our bodies, we will no longer have a means to self-medicate. In spirit prison the pain will be raw and full and no doubt, agonizingly miserable.

The good news is that in the hell of Spirit Prison, relief from that kind of miserable discomfort comes in the same way as it does here in mortality. It comes of allowing the Master to heal all our wounds. You see, the occupants of Spirit Prison will be visited by harbingers of joy not unlike those of us who visit the Detention Center. These bearers of truth will carry the good news of the Gospel to those in the agony of their pain and help them drop their burdens at His feet, just like we may here in mortality.

Years ago a dear friend suffered the amputation of his lower right leg due to cancer. I went to see him in the hospital. As I entered his room I found him with the stump of his leg pointed toward the ceiling and he was pounding on his remaining thigh.

"What on earth are you doing?" I asked.

"My foot itches!" he agonized.

"You don't even have a foot." I complained.

"My brain doesn't know that yet!" was his aggravated reply.

Have you ever had an itch on the bottom of your foot that was so intense that you had to rip your shoe off and just claw at it? That was the way he described his discomfort. His brain and severed nerves had not yet adjusted to the missing limb and his brain would not be persuaded that his foot didn't itch.

Another friend once explained his motivation for finding recovery from alcoholism

and drug abuse. He told me, "I didn't want to arrive in the Spirit World with an itch I couldn't scratch." That would indeed be hell. That, I believe is the "thorny path" which Joseph Smith reportedly spoke of when he encouraged parents of wayward children.

"The Prophet Joseph Smith declared—and he never taught more comforting doctrine—that the eternal sealings of faithful parents and the divine promises made to them for valiant service in the Cause of Truth, would save not only themselves, but likewise their posterity. Though some of the sheep may wander, the eye of the Shepherd is upon them, and sooner or later they will feel the tentacles of Divine Providence reaching out after them and drawing them back to the fold. Either in this life or the life to come, they will return. They will have to pay their debt to justice; they will suffer for their sins; and may tread a thorny path; but if it leads them at last, like the penitent Prodigal, to a loving and forgiving father's heart and home, the painful experience will not have been in vain. Pray for your careless and disobedient children; hold on to them with your faith. Hope on, trust on, till you see the salvation of God."[5]

I suppose that enduring the untamed, raw pain of our lives in Spirit Prison will be a thorny path indeed. I suppose that the misery will be an enormous distraction that will make it difficult to hear, trust and accept the message of Salvation, but I also suppose that it will be unbearable enough that those suffering such agony will be willing to do whatever it takes to be relieved of the pain. How wonderful to know, because of our experience laboring for them in the Temples, that there is an end to their suffering, that there is yet a chance to enter into that healing, perfecting covenant of Salvation with the Lord.

Having spent four years ministering to prisoners in jail and another six doing the same thing in juvenile detention, I've come to love and feel for these suffering souls. I hope that once I've crossed to the Spirit World that I will yet again, be called to labor in Prison. In fact, the love I feel for these brothers and sisters of mine has spawned a hope that, if I am permitted to tarry, I'd like to remain in Hell, to share the message of the Atonement, until the last of us comes forth into the joy of redemption.

Chapter 3 - Life on Our Own Terms

"Confound it!" my grandfather used to cuss, when he was frustrated.

In ancient Babel the people built a tower. Their objective? To get to heaven.

What's so wrong with that? Isn't going to Heaven a worthy goal; even the ultimate goal? Of course it is. So then why did God put a stop to it?

The simple answer is that it wouldn't work. It was a horrendous waste of time. If we examine it further though, it was a direct affront to God's Plan of Salvation.

These people had, no doubt, been informed of God's plan for their eventual joyful acceptance into Heaven and they had either doubted it would work or had out right

rejected it.

The concept of Heaven still appealed to them though, and they, being unwilling to go there on God's terms, set out to go there on their own. Obviously, they were very earnest about it too. One account says that they mourned the loss of a brick more than they did the loss of a worker who might have fallen to his death from its heights. To them the goal was more important than even those who were pursuing it.

Some apocryphal accounts indicate that the tower was enormous. The Book of Jasher says that it took a laborer an entire year to carry a load of bricks to the summit. I'm a bit skeptical of that, but apparently somebody was impressed with its size. That book also explains that there were three types of participants in the Tower's construction. First there was Nimrod, their leader. His objective was to conquer Heaven, to slay God and take His place. Others, in defiance of God's Plan wanted an alternate route to Heaven that would in effect allow them to have their cake, and eat it too. The final category was people who just wanted an insurance policy. They were willing to try God's plan, sort of, but wanted something to fall back on in the event that it failed them somehow.

We have all three types in the world today. I personally have spent a lot of time in camp two. Gradually, I became more willing to accept God's Plan and moved to camp three. While it was an improvement, I still got confounded.

You remember the story. God, in His displeasure at this horrible affront to His Plan and to the Redeemer who made it viable, put a stop to its construction by confounding their languages. With its builders no longer able to communicate, construction of the tower ground to a halt.

Have you ever felt confounded? Have you ever felt that despite your best efforts toward a worthy goal, toward reaching Heaven, that your efforts were inconveniently hampered in some way? Perhaps you ought to ask yourself, "Am I a tower builder?" "Am I trying to get to Heaven on my own terms rather than Heavenly Father's?"

I once served as Stake Mission President. Being a tower builder at the time, it was all about the numbers for me. I had myself persuaded that every convert baptism was another brick in my tower. I was convinced that the more people I helped join the church, the higher my tower would become. I was motivated, ambitious and because I was successful; I was self-righteous. The book of Jasher says that the builders of the Tower of Babel mourned the loss of a brick, more than the loss of a laborer, so intent were they on increasing its altitude. While I used some pretty cutting edge methods to motivate the other missionaries, they never met my expectations. I was always frustrated that they were retarding my progress. I was critical of my leaders too - for not lavishing my program with all the resources, in material and personnel, I required to meet my ambitious goals. For me a higher tower was more important than either the laborers or the prospective converts. Getting me to Heaven superseded every other objective. Fortunately, many lives were blessed during those years despite my selfish agenda, because God is kind

and wouldn't punish them for my sins. I am so grateful for that. Nevertheless, I spent much of that time feeling frustrated and confounded. You see, in my mind I was fully justified. I was seeking Heaven after all; not hell for crying out loud. I had myself utterly deceived. I was also an addict during those years. Looking back I realize that while I was probably in the camp who wanted to apply the Redeeming Blood of Christ to my sin sick soul; I was investing my labor in the Kingdom as an insurance policy against the possibility I wouldn't be redeemed. Instead I might have been performing that labor as an expression of gratitude that I had been. I was a tower builder.

Tower builders are control freaks. They want to be in charge of the terms and conditions of their lives. They bear that confounded burden called pride. We will learn later on in the book, how to relinquish that control, that pride, so that God's wonderful plan for our lives can have its glorious effect. We don't get confounded when we are on His errand, only when our errands are our own. Frustration is my own red flag that warns me when I'm about to add another brick to my tower. When I go to tower building, Heavenly Father always lets me know, by lovingly, reliably, definitely frustrating my efforts. When, like my grandfather I find myself swearing, "Confound it!" under my breath, I have to stop and think, "That's right! Thank you Heavenly Father for yet another course correction!"

Chapter 3 – Treating Wounds Not Symptoms

So far we have discovered that part and parcel of mortality is the certainty that we will be mistreated by ourselves and others and thus become wounded. Brother Dr. John L. Lund[6] once told a story that deeply inspired me and has since comforted so many youth at the Detention Center. In that talk he described his wonderful hunting dog about which he frequently bragged. This was a dog that lived to serve his master! Some acquaintances of John's suggested he put-his-money-where-his-mouth-is and take them into the field to see for themselves. This he did, but as they entered the field the dog wouldn't hunt. Embarrassed John took the dog home where, on closer examination, he discovered a serious gash across the dog's chest and foreleg. It was then apparent that the dog wouldn't serve his master, not because he was unfaithful, but because he was deeply injured. At Dr. Lund's suggestion, I listened with my spiritual ears and discovered that such is true of all of us. The transformation that occurs from the sweetness of childhood is fraught with wounds and scars. And the fact that we don't serve our Master in ways that once seemed natural to us is not because we're necessarily unfaithful, but because we've become so distracted by our various wounds.

Have you ever wondered why you often behave in a manner incongruent with your beliefs? Could it be that you are wounded in some way and have become distracted

from your intent? Could it be that you have selected unhealthy behaviors to comfort you in your pain? Could it be that given healing balm, you might recover and return to healthier, more righteous behavior simply because the distracting pain and wary guardedness, no longer exists?

Such was the case with me. I find it interesting that we often have not identified the source of our pain. By a sort of traumatic amnesia, we tend to forget, ignore or conceal from ourselves such unpleasant memories from our past. Additionally, many of us were told how we felt. When we skin a knee a parent may have told us, "Hop up you're not hurt." Or when we cried from disappointment or embarrassment we may have been told, "Big boys don't cry." Or "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me." It was a lie. But, believing it, we began to suppress our pain and deal with it in healthy and dishonest ways. Painful though it may be, shouldn't we revisit those memories and discover what caused our pain?

In the year 2000, Disney produced a wonderful movie called **The Kid** starring Bruce Willis and Spencer Breslin. Both actors played the part of Russ Duritz, one old and one young (Rusty). Russ is successful as an accomplished image consultant, but his relationships were a shambles. In a mystical warp of time, Rusty appears on Russ's doorstep one day. After some antics, they put the pieces together and realize they are one and the same. Russ' objective of course is to get Rusty out of his life. He begins to surmise that he needs to help Rusty with some of his childhood issues, things like bullies and the general morass of whimpiness. Rusty on the other hand is thoroughly disappointed with Russ, who has neither wife, nor dog, nor airplane; the focus of his childhood dreams. "I grow up to be a loser," he laments to Russ.

In a wonderful scene they wind up back in the old neighborhood. Rusty has been suspended from school and his mother has been called from her sick bed to collect him and take him home. The scene unfolds as Rusty and his Mom are entering their house. Dad arrives and in a fit of fury screams and yells at Rusty for being such a problem child. Rusty is heartbroken to have disappointed his Dad, but he's also bitter to have been so harshly judged and mistreated.

Throughout the scene, Russ is observing from the street. Russ knows some things that Rusty doesn't. Russ knows that Mom is dying of cancer. Russ is now mature enough to realize that Mom's illness places enormous stress on his Dad. Russ knows that his parents had not told Rusty about his mother's terminal illness and compassionately surmises that they simply did not know how. Russ realizes that he has never pulled that horrible childhood memory and others from those dark days, out into the light of adulthood and reexamined them from the perspective of maturity and subsequent evidence. Now, by some miracle, he has done so and this cathartic process of discovery goes a long way toward identifying and then healing his previously neglected wounds. I'll let you watch the film to see how it all turns out.

The Fourth of the 12 Steps was very useful in helping me make similarly cathartic

realizations about my past. Not only did it allow me to sort out the causes of my pain, it allowed me to understand, forgive and be forgiven. Much of this process involves an honest, fearless look into our past. Honesty invites the companionship of the Spirit and the presence of the Holy Ghost, is healing balm indeed. He can, in the process of revelation and sanctification prepare us for the healing ministrations that come as we invite the Savior to apply the intimate majesty of the Atonement in our lives.

It is time to clean out our emotional basements where the detritus of a lifetime has accumulated and bogged us down. Often these days, we hear such advice in its literal sense. The uncluttering our physical lives can lead to the uncluttering of our emotional and spiritual ones. It is all baggage that burdens us and makes us less useful and productive. It harbors wounds that keep us from serving the Master we would otherwise be eager to serve.

The following year John Lund took his dog back into the field. Healed, the dog hunted like a champion and once again experienced the joy of fully, heartily serving his beloved master.

I have seen this happen to many wounded and damaged souls. Once healed it seems to be everyone's instinctive inclination to serve the Master who healed them. It is the automatic outcome of getting acquainted with Him in our extremity. It is the intrinsic outflow of choosing to become willing to expose our tender spots to His ministrations and healing touch. It becomes our divine expression of gratitude. I had to carefully select the descriptors in these recent sentences because I wanted to avoid the use of *nature* and *natural*. "The natural man is an enemy to God[7]," and this is the healing that helps us overcome the natural man and become a friend to God.

I had an acquaintance at work that became addicted to Methamphetamines. His decline was swift and devastating. He was living a promiscuous, immoral life and was sustaining his evil ambitions with artificial energy derived from the drug. Of course, in the end it sapped the strength of his body as well as his character. He dwindled to near 100 pounds. His teeth were rotten and falling out. He was a mess. One day the boss fired him and he dropped out of sight. I assumed he crawled into a hole and died somewhere.

Years later I walked into a 12 Step meeting where I spotted a familiar face I couldn't exactly place. Introducing myself I was shocked to discover it was this same man. He was robust and healthy. He had a pleasant, attractive smile. It was him alright and you could have blown me over with a feather. When it came his turn to share, he apologized for missing the last meeting with these words: "I had to decide whether to come here to go the Temple. After much prayer I concluded that God would be most pleased if I served that night in His holy house."

My friends grievous, near fatal wounds had been healed. And he was back to eagerly serving his Master.

Chapter 4 – What Are We Waiting For?

When the Jaredites left the tower of Babel and headed for the Promised Land, they built barges and sailed some distance before coming to the shores of a great sea. I have no evidence of this, but it seems like they may have sailed the length of the Mediterranean Sea and stopped to rest on the shores of the Atlantic, perhaps on the Iberian Peninsula. At this point they settled down for a while. They pitched their tents and went about local living for the next four years.

"And it came to pass at the end of four years that the Lord came again unto the brother of Jared, and stood in a cloud and talked with him. And for the space of three hours did the Lord talk with the brother of Jared, and chastened him because he remembered not to call upon the name of the Lord.[8]

I've always taken this to mean that the Brother of Jared had stopped praying for four years. Looking at this experience through the lens of my own experience though, I've come to believe that the Brother of Jared had probably said his prayers. He and his family had continued to bless the food and go through the motions of prayer. What I suppose he had failed to do was to ask the Lord for further direction. It had been a long arduous journey already. They had come a great distance and still not found the Promised Land. Then, upon arriving at the great sea, they camped to rest.

Certainly, they strongly suspected that their journey was not yet complete. Surely, the need to cross the frightening obstacle before them kept niggling in the back of their minds. Apparently, too fearful to ask, they just settled in and ignored the problem. Don't we often do the same thing?

Most of us have encountered a problem that was too frightening to address. We build our lives around it, hang decorations on it and try to camouflage its existence so we don't have to deal with it. We hesitate to bring it up with the Lord because we're pretty sure He'll expect us to deal with it. We know we'd rather not and so we falter.

Mahonri Moriancumer (the brother of Jared) faltered in such a way for four years. Certainly, he did so with the full support of his family. I have faltered longer than that.

I too said my prayers. I told Heavenly Father what I wanted. I was happy to direct Him around the universe, but I was wholly unwilling to let Him direct me.

I suppose that in the Jaredite's collective imagination, the task of crossing the ocean was completely terrifying. Clearly the vessels they had previously built weren't adequate for such a voyage. Most likely, they hadn't a clue as to how to build vessels that were. Probably, they were exhausted by the journey that brought them this far. They likely thought, they deserved to kick back a while and get some rest. Weeks turned into months, months into years and still they lingered on the plateau of their previous accomplishments, so very far from the summit of success. They may well have needed a break, a time of recuperation, but they didn't trust

the Lord to see it that way. We'll deal with that in the next chapter. For now though we need to address the issue immediately at hand. The issue we all face; are we willing to take direction from the Lord or not? Are we willing to approach our Goliaths? Are we willing to climb our mountains? Are we willing to do what it takes to reach the Promised Land?

Toward the end of my mission to the Philippines I was released as a Zone Leader and sent to spend my final three months as District Leader to the Marikina-Pasig District. Our District had two Sisters and four Elders. I was assigned a new missionary to train. And, I was called to serve as the Branch President of the Marikina-Pasig Branch. I was overwhelmed.

The evening of this call I was also directed to attend a meeting of all the Branch Presidents in the city. Mine was the only Branch presided over by a missionary. The District President announced plans to build a new chapel in Quezon City. It would be the second chapel to be constructed in that great country. Each Branch was given an assessment for a portion of the building's cost. It was a time when some of the funds needed to be raised locally. I was given the assessment for our Branch and then informed that we were expected to raise it before I departed for home in three short months. I was stunned to say the least.

I could not imagine how on earth such an enormous project could be addressed in so short a time.

I went from that meeting to a transfer meeting where I was introduced to my new Greenie. Greenie was an unfair term to describe Elder Hapi. He was a man of faith, accomplishment and courage and he hit the ground running. I don't think he had a 'green' moment the entire time I worked with him. He was the first student outside the United States to receive the David O. McKay Scholarship. He'd been captain of the Church College of New Zealand rugby team. He'd been recruited to play for the All Blacks and had come on his mission instead. His Maori heritage included the boy who while receiving a name and a blessing by Apostle Matthew Cowley, had also received his sight.

I remember complaining that I couldn't possibly accomplish what had been asked of me and being told by Elder Hapi that I didn't have to.

"This is God's work," he explained in his rich New Zealand accent, "And He is able to do it. All you have to do is be His voice and His hands."

I had no idea what he was talking about. I immediately went into denial. I had plenty to accomplish and lots to keep me busy. It was easy to ignore the terrifying task of raising such a substantial sum of money. I excused myself saying, "I haven't got the skills." "It is too much to ask to so short a time." "I was called to do missionary work, not fund raising." "How convenient it is for the District President, to have me to dump his responsibility upon." "I have too many responsibilities already; I certainly don't need one more." Never once did I take the matter up with the Lord. I suppose I told Him what He should do to fix the situation, but I never once asked what He would "have me to do[9]."

Elder Hapi could see that I was ignoring the elephant in the room, so he suggested

we fast and pray, which we did. I considered that fast to be the price I was going to pay to bribe God into doing the whole thing without me.

Then one day, out tracting, we encountered a man who was manager for the U-Tex professional basketball team. At this discovery, the Spirit gave me a nudge which I ignored. Then Elder Hapi gave me a nudge. I ignored that too. He nudged me again. "What?" I asked impatiently.

"Here is your answer."

"Here is my answer to what?"

Seeing that I was clueless, he requested permission to proceed without me. In my confusion I granted that permission.

Elder Hapi asked the fellow if his basketball team might be willing to play an exhibition game as a fund raiser to help us build a church building. He told us he thought they might.

The next two months were a rollercoaster ride of ups and downs, setbacks and miracles that culminated in a wonderful occasion that not only raised our assessment, but bolstered the Branch budget and proved to be a remarkable missionary opportunity. Elder Hapi, while graciously acknowledging and protecting the fact that I held the Priesthood keys for the task before us, carefully, kindly, taught me how to serve the Lord by asking Him what I should do, rather than spending my prayers telling Him what to do.

Our loving Heavenly Father gave us plenty of practice. We had to negotiate with government officials and church officials. We even negotiated with the head of the Philippine Basketball Association who happened to be a Catholic Priest from Ireland. So many times I was tempted to just give up, but on our knees, as Elder Hapi besought the Lord for direction, I began to learn how to receive that revelation and to have the faith to step into the unknown to carry it out. I was terrified that the priest would turn us down, but his reply only verified what Elder Hapi had been trying to teach me. "Go with God me boys!" he encouraged in his broad Irish accent. "And tell'em a Jesuit sent ye!"

I was grateful for the good priest's blessing, but I knew then who sent me and I finally and fully was willing to go.

We are all given such crises in our lives; problems and challenges that seem bigger than we can manage. Circumstances that indeed are bigger than we are. We are given opportunities that teach us to rely upon the grace and goodness of God. You may have one before you right now. You might be ignoring it; that elephant in the room. What are you waiting for? In his book *Promise Me*, Richard Paul Evans makes a wonderful observation:

"Why do we delay the changes that will bring us happiness? It's like finally fixing up the house the week before you sell it."

Do you wish your challenges would magically go away? What would you learn from that? You've probably prayed that God would take it away, like I did in the Philippines. Won't you consider asking God what you should do instead? Let the Jaredites show you that "whom the Lord calls, the Lord qualifies[10]."

I am learning that my prayers get answered much more quickly and effectively when rather than giving God counsel, I take counsel from His hand[11].

Chapter 5 – Why Should We Fear?

Now that we've learned that seeking God's counsel is to our distinct advantage lets deal a little more directly with our hesitation, our fear.

I have a good friend who grew up in North Dakota. He learned to drive on the family farm. His wife grew up in Los Angeles, California and learned to drive on the freeway. Gus was quite aware that Kathy didn't think much of his city driving. One day he told me of a trip they'd taken over the weekend out to the City. On the way he began to think about Kathy's misgivings. He realized that much of her difficulty arose from fear. He decided to swallow his pride and let her drive. Gus pulled the car over before they entered the busy streets, walked around and opened Kathy's door.

"Scoot over honey?" he asked.

"What's this?" she queried.

"No sense both of us driving."

I remember how I laughed. It is funny because we all know about backseat drivers and what can result from such a situation. Fear and pride can quickly spoil what might otherwise be a pleasant, happy time. Gus had learned to put fear and pride aside.

Helaman and his Stripling Warriors had to do the same thing as they approached the city of Manti. They were severely out manned, grossly under fed, and expected to rout an enemy that was firmly entrenched in superior fortifications. They understood and accepted the Lord's charge to retake the city. They were past the stage of ignoring the Lord's expectations, but they weren't ignorant of the enormity of their task. The following verses explain how they let go of fear and pride.

"Therefore we did pour out our souls in prayer to God, that he would strengthen us and deliver us out of the hands of our enemies, yea, and also give us strength that we might retain our cities, and our lands, and our possessions, for the support of our people.

Yea, and it came to pass that the Lord our God did visit us with assurances that he would deliver us; yea, insomuch that he did speak peace to our souls, and did grant unto us great faith, and did cause us that we should hope for our deliverance in him.

And we did take courage with our small force which we had received, and were fixed with a determination to conquer our enemies, and to maintain our lands, and our possessions, and our wives, and our children, and the cause of our liberty.

And thus we did go forth with all our might against the Lamanites...[12]” Did you notice that the Lord visited them with assurances that He would deliver them? What might those have been? Perhaps the scriptures assured them with reminders of other times when Israel was delivered from their enemies. Quite possibly, they were assured by the Title of Liberty beneath which they knew their cause was just. Very likely, the miraculous nature of their previous experiences, assured them that God was sustaining their best efforts. I’m confident that they bore testimony to one another of God’s goodness and of His powerful support. Surely, great assurance came from those powerful witnesses.

We are free to seek and obtain similar assurances when we are upon the Lord’s errands. We too, can feast upon the assurance of the scriptures. We too, may bear and hear powerful testimonies. I think of the words of that great song which invokes God to be with you. Remember the words, “keep love’s banner floating o’er you, smite death’s threatening wave before you, God be with you ‘til we meet again[13].

Surely the Nephites sang such a hymn as they marched off to protect their families beneath love’s banner, the Title of Liberty. Do we march beneath love’s banner as we seek to overcome our problems? If not there may be no assurances to be had.

The Lord assured them by speaking peace to their souls. How blessed it is to go into life’s battles feeling the assurance of peace. There may be hardship, suffering even loss, but the peace of knowing God has the outcome in His hands is a priceless gift given only to those who seek nothing but to do His will.

Finally, the Lord granted them great faith. I used to think I had to conjure up my own faith from somewhere deep in my guts. What comfort it is to hear these words. Faith was given to them. More and more I realize that

God not only requires great things of us he grants us **all** the resources required to make them happen. All of them.

Nephi knew this,[14] may we? And so, like Nephi, Helaman and his army “went forth” and without the loss of a single life took possession of all that quarter of the land. Not for any power of themselves, but because of God’s divine assistance, His grace.

When I was first emerging from addiction, I had worked the 12 Steps as guided by Colleen Harrison through her great book, *He Did Deliver Me from Bondage*. I was feeling freedom for the first time in 45 years. One morning I was studying the 11th Step which is about maintaining constant, conscious, contact with God. The Spirit stirred within me and I desired to do this with all my heart. Knowing that obedience to the promptings of the Spirit was key to receiving continuous guidance from the Spirit, I dropped to my knees to make such a commitment. I promised Heavenly Father that for that day, I would do whatever He asked. I committed to doing that one thing without fail.

I was having a wonderful day! Everything was going according to plan. In the late afternoon I went to Stake Priesthood meeting. During the meeting the Stake President spoke. He informed us that the Church had developed its own 12 Step Addiction Recovery Program. He admonished any who suffered from addictive behavior to attend that meeting. Immediately, the Spirit whispered, “Go to that meeting.” My heart sank.

I wandered home in a daze. Once there I retired to my room and dropped to my knees. “I addressed Heavenly Father and reminded Him of my earlier promise. I said, “Father, I know I promised that I’d do whatever Thou asked of me today, but I’m going to have to break that promise unless Thou art willing to let me off the hook on the meeting tonight.”

I just couldn’t do it. I had lived a life of secrecy and care, fully intending that no one but my Bishops would ever know. I had attended on line meetings of this nature had been triggered to use as a result. I couldn’t imagine a meeting would be beneficial and knew it would be mortifying. I plead and begged but could not feel excused to stay home. I remained desperately, fearfully stubborn in my determination to stay home. That is until, in my

heart, I heard these words, “No sense both of us driving.”

As quickly as I had laughed when Gus told me his story, I realized what my Father was telling me. If I didn’t get out of the driver’s seat, my safety would be in peril. But if I would just trust His driving expertise I could just sit back, relax and enjoy the ride. He wouldn’t have to nag me and I wouldn’t be tempted to protect my pride with barbs and complaints about his counsel. He had spoken to me in language that I could understand. I am so grateful for that.

I got right up and went to that meeting. I’m convinced that I wouldn’t be enjoying sobriety today, were it not for that fateful, blessed revelation and my eventual willingness to trust in the Lord. He did indeed give me assurance, peace and faith sufficient for my need. And, though I was seriously short of manpower to overcome my bondage He did, in very deed, deliver me because, trusting Him, I was finally willing to go forth.

Chapter 6 – Suffering Manipulation

We live in a highly manipulative society. By exposure, we learn that manipulative skills are useful in helping us get what we desire for ourselves. Most of us learn this from manipulative parents, teachers, associates, employers and friends. For the purposes of this discussion let’s use Merriam Webster’s definition:

to control or play upon, by artful, unfair or insidious means to one’s own advantage. Often it is difficult to determine the motivations of the manipulator. Often he will tell you he is “doing for your own good.” He may even have himself convinced that such is his motivation. Too often though, the real motivation for the manipulator is, as the definition explains, to gain some advantage for himself. If the manipulator’s advantage is not part of the equation, we will call it influence and not manipulation. If a parent exercises control over a child having a tantrum in a grocery store because she wants the child to learn appropriate social behavior, then it is influence. If that same parent exercises control in the same situation for the purpose of avoiding personal public humiliation; it is manipulation. I suppose the parent’s motivation may not make much difference early on; but it doesn’t take long for even small children to sense the difference.

Habitual manipulators quickly learn techniques that facilitate their control over others. One is to never let the subject of your manipulation off the hook. If the manipulator is never satisfied, his subject will stay on her toes. Conversely, if the manipulator praises a job well done the subject may relax and revert to former ways that don't benefit the controlling party. That is unless the praise is a set up for further or deeper manipulative objectives.

Now, I'm no psychiatrist. I have to empirical evidence to present in support of this discussion. What I do offer is a measure of skill, acquired at the hands of parents who were master manipulators.

When I was doing the Fourth Step in the process of my recovery from addiction, my sponsor asked me to list all of the people, institutions and events for which I harbored resentment. I was earnest in doing so. In every case I began to realize that the resentment grew out of a perception that I was being, in most cases blatantly, manipulated. Prior to this exercise I had held resentments for people; afterward my resentment was directed at the practice of manipulation. I was able to forgive my manipulators because it is a learned practice; learned in a manipulative environment. I was required to forgive them because I discovered that I too had become a masterful manipulator. Of course, that meant I required forgiveness as well.

As children our first effort is to comply with our manipulator's wishes. We want to please; we need to keep the peace.

Later, as we begin to discover that noncompliance creates discomfort of some sort we still try to comply, but less willingly. Soon, though we often discover that our manipulator can't be pleased and that no matter how hard we try we can't fully comply. This is when, to keep the peace, we learn to lie. If only we can persuade our manipulator that we're doing what she wishes, maybe we'll get along.

The biggest way in which we lie, is in behaving in a way that is inconsistent with our true selves. This incongruence becomes the beginning of many of our problems. Pretending to be something we are not is the hardest, most destructive lie of all. Well did Lehi say, "Woe be unto the liar, for he shall be thrust down to hell." In a most poignant way this is the immediate consequence of lying, not just the long term end result. Living in a way that is dishonest and incongruent is hell. It just is. There is another step in this process. Many of us get sick and tired of the burden of compliance and/or lying about it. At this point we finally rebel. We've had stomach full of manipulation and we finally say, "No more!"

This might be okay if we went back to being true to ourselves, but usually, we just become oppositionally defiant. Too often we, in our rebellion, refuse to do anything our manipulator wants, even if it is to our own detriment. This too is hell. And it is hell bent for destruction.

I have a friend whose big sister was his primary manipulator. They are both in their sixties now. Their mother recently celebrated her 85th birthday. My friend adores his mother. The big sister decided to throw a big party for mom and approached my friend in her typical manipulative style. "We're having a party for mom and

you'd darn well better be there." Obviously, she was implying that he couldn't possibly get anything right without her oversight. Predictably, she was also going to take credit for his participation by informing everyone, including mom that she'd personally seen to it that he was in attendance.

Forty some odd years ago my friend had quit lying to his manipulator and simply rebelled. He'd made a promise to himself that he'd never comply with her wishes again. After all this time, his commitment held. He did not go to the party. He wanted to, but he couldn't bear to have her get the credit. It killed him to stay away, but it would also have killed him to go. At least those are the words he used when he described his inner conflict to me.

Clearly, if he were healthy, mature, self possessed and humble, he would have done the right thing – regardless of who got the credit. But people who are under the thumb of a serious manipulator are seldom healthy, mature, self possessed or humble.

In my work with troubled youth and addicted adults I see manipulation as a common thread and threat in their lives. Most have departed from healthy living and responsible choice making as casualties along the course of manipulation. Satan's plan in the pre-mortal life was clearly an act of manipulation. Remember the definition? Was it not his desire to control and play upon us, by insidious means; for his own personal glory? Was it not to accomplish his own personal ends, with no regard for what might become of us? Absolutely, it was! So here we are, having rejected his manipulation, and yet he has infiltrated our culture with the very method of controlling one another that we then, rejected.

Obviously there are degrees on both sides of this equation. Most of society manipulates. Usually, it is not utterly devastating. But the more selfish society becomes the worse manipulation becomes and the more devastating results we see. Our jails, prisons and therapeutic institutions are filling up with the carnage of this rampant disease.

Chapter 7 – Becoming Manipulators Ourselves

The very moment we respond to a manipulator with an incongruent act, a lie or outright rebellion, we have joined their ranks. This disease or system of behavior is just that insidious. Any violation of true principles, in order to appease a manipulator is also manipulation. It is! By definition! What are we doing? We are trying to play upon or control our manipulator by devious means to accomplish our own ends, which are generally to get them off our backs!

I attended a 12 Steps meeting in the County Jail once as a guest of the Facilitator. During the meeting the Facilitator noticed one of the younger inmates wearing a brand new pair of Airwalk sneakers. He stopped his discussion, turned to the young fellow and asked, "Who did you have to manipulate to get those new shoes?"

"Nobody."

"Really? How'd you get them then?"

"My Mom brought them to me."

"Why did she do that?"

"Because I asked her to."

"Could you tell us what you said when you asked her to?"

The young man hung his head and muttered something unintelligible. You need to understand that my Facilitator friend had, himself, spent four years in the State Penitentiary. This kid wasn't pulling the wool over his eyes. He asked the young man to stand up. He instructed him to hold his head up, look him in the eyes and answer the question, out loud, like a man. The young man stood trembling, with tears rolling down his cheeks and he looked at his mentor and said, "I told her that if she loved me she'd get me some new shoes."

My friend commended him for his courage to face his own failings. That was all that was said on the subject. The young man knew that by putting his mother on a guilt trip, he had most definitely manipulated her. When it came down to identifying what he'd done, he was automatically ashamed of himself. Instead of cowering in fear of repercussions, the young man stood and took full responsibility for the shameful thing which he had done.

At the end of the meeting, the embrace between these two men was heartfelt and sincere. Each clearly knew the heart of the other with no deceit or ulterior motives clouding their relationship. One day, with such practice, that young man might also enjoy such an open, honest relationship with his mother, untainted by manipulation. *Guilt tripping* is rampant in our culture. It is probably the most common form of manipulation. One of the places it occurs most is in the church. I remember a young man whose father was not active in church. When he turned sixteen and became eligible to deer hunt his father suggested they go get his first deer on Sunday. The young man had an enormous struggle. On the one hand he was a faithful priesthood holder who wanted to do his duty. On the other hand his father only had Sundays off and there would be no other opportunity to hunt with him. Now, I'm not even going to suggest what the appropriate course of action might be in this situation. I can personally see merits in either choice. I also think that this was a decision best left to the young man. After all, we are given our own personal agency, are we not?

His Priest's Quorum adviser, however, had other ideas. He seemed certain the young man was bound for hell if he went hunting. So certain, that he told him so. He spread the guilt on the poor young man and secured a commitment to stay and attend to his Priesthood duties. The boy's father went without him; after a few words that may have been manipulative as well. That father died of a heart attack

that morning, alone on the mountain, while his son was in Priesthood Meeting. The boy never set foot inside the church again.

Had that boy made his own decision, unfettered by the manipulation of his leader, he might be active in the church today. The decision would have been his own, and he wouldn't have had the church to blame. As it was, a powerful personality had unfairly influenced his choice and thus embittered him by the outcome.

I preyed upon my wife in a similar manner once. I had announced my forthcoming retirement from UPS. My wife was overjoyed and asked me what I intended to do next. I told her that my pension would not be sufficient to keep us as comfortably as we'd become accustomed....unless....we went on a Mission to the Philippines, where our monthly expenses would be much cheaper.

My wife has not been interested in going on a senior mission. I have known this for quite some time. I on the other hand am hard pressed to think of a time when I was more joyful than during my missionary experience. Going again would be a real treat for me.

My statement to her was a clear case of what I now call spiritual manipulation, though I didn't recognize it at the time. All I knew right then was her reaction was one of obvious disappointment and very obvious withdrawal. She was not the only one who withdrew; so did the Holy Ghost. Being shut out by my wife and the Spirit simultaneously was not an experience that was easy to miss. I was sick about it and very confused. After a couple of days of this seemingly universal cold shoulder I decided I'd better fast and pray and try to come to some understanding of what I had done wrong. I was sure it would please the Lord if we went on a mission. I had plenty of authoritative reference material to back up my position. I could understand my wife's dismay, but why would the Spirit of the Lord be withdrawn. I went to the temple and spent a good time in the Celestial room pondering my dilemma. After much prayer and consideration I felt the loving presence of the Spirit; come to instruct me. Into my mind came these words.

"You despise manipulation don't you? Can't you see that even spiritual manipulation is wrong? You were wrong in putting your wife on a guilt trip that way. She has her agency too, you know. If I want you on a mission, I'll get you on a mission! It is a call, after all! You don't need to pull any strings to ensure that my will for you is accomplished. I am able to do my own work. All you must do is serve me where you're planted. *It may not be on a mountain height or over the stormy sea...*"

Now, you might imagine that these words came into my mind as scolding or chastening; not so. They came to me, borne of the Spirit as sweet words of instruction and comfort. I walked out of the Temple completely emancipated from what I had considered an obligation that I was going to be unable to fulfill. I had thought I was expected to go on a mission and that I had to exert all the influence I had to see that it came to pass. I was building a tower of Babel and the goal was more important to me than who got trodden on or pushed aside during the construction of it.

Now, I had heard many times, from the pulpit, that a Senior Mission was a desirable thing to do. I'm not saying that the speakers had intended to put me on a guilt trip (though I have heard guilt trips delivered from the pulpit on occasion) but being a manipulator, it is just as likely that I, as a natural response to my culture, put myself on a guilt trip and then attempted to transfer it on to my dear wife.

Remember our discussion of internal, spiritual wounds that are the cause of the outward behavioral symptoms we see in so many. My observation is that most if not all of those wounds come of manipulation in one of its ugly forms. Consider a few examples:

Rape: Is there a worse case of manipulation, of controlling another for one's own purposes?

War: How many soldiers, lacking any personal conviction as to the value and merit of their commitment come home mentally and emotionally ill because they've been manipulated into doing something horrifying for someone's purpose other than their own? Meanwhile, soldiers who feel a commitment to a cause, having chosen to go, rather than having been manipulated into the battlefield, more often come home healthy.

Trophy Kids: By this I mean kids whose parents want them to be successful for personal reasons, like bragging rights, instead of for the child's own development and happiness. I see this quite often on the Little League field and other sports venues. It happens in beauty pageants and spelling bees and any where excellence might boost a parent's own ego. Kids can sense whether a parent's interest is in themselves or in their child.

Domestic Violence: Always the easy way for the manipulator to get his way; by brute force.

Bullying: Not much different that domestic violence, is it?

Brow Beating: Who has truly grown spiritually from being scolded, shamed, guilt tripped or brow beaten into something? Of course not! Doing the right things for the wrong reasons yields no satisfaction or peace; more likely resentment and bitterness which is an insidious form of personal injury inflicted on many.

The list could go on and on, but hopefully, you can see that manipulation in all its hideous forms is a key cause of the pain that results in widespread addiction and misbehavior.

All of us, if we've gone to school, voted for a political candidate, or bought a car, are victims of manipulation. Most likely, all of us are also perpetrators of this tool of implementing Satan's initial and insidious plan. Let us strive to be more aware of manipulation's destructive influence in our lives.

Chapter 8 – Manipulating God

I once had occasion to be a commission salesman. There were times when the job

paid quite well. But then there were lean times when, having not sold a thing, I had no revenue coming in. Those were scary times.

I remember one Saturday morning. I got up early. My mind had been reeling in the night worrying about making sufficient money. I read the scriptures, said my prayers and determined that I'd fast and pray that I might have a good day in the sales department. I told Heavenly Father as much. I informed him that it was my intention to fast and pray that day. In my prayer I implied that I was willing to starve myself and go thirsty during a hot day on the lot and that considering that sacrifice, it was only fitting that God grant me some sales. At this point I got a very different answer to my prayers than I expected.

The Spirit whispered to me something to this effect, "I thought fasting was meant to assist you in learning to submit your will to that of the Father. Instead, it appears that you are seeking to put God on a guilt trip. Do you really intend to use your fast as a means to inflict your will upon God? Do you really intend to manipulate the Father?"

On that occasion I was duly chastened and went about my fast in an entirely different and more productive fashion. This was no small event for me. It was an epiphany of life changing proportions. It changed the way I'll fast, forever more. More importantly, it set me on a course of seeking to know and do the will of the Father continually.

It was one thing to sit back and let God drive. It was quite another to seek his will and to deliberately, aggressively attempt to accomplish it.

Sign seeking is a manipulative activity. It is a negotiating procedure intended to get the recipient what he wants. Like all manipulation, it ends up backfiring in one's face. Take Sherem[15] for example; or Korihor[16]. They were using the challenge for a sign to prove their own ends. They had no desire to change their position, but rather used the challenge with the intent of strengthening their position.

It was not so for Gideon[17], who was seeking a sign of assurance, not delivering a challenge to disprove his skeptical position. It was plain that Gideon was a believer and that he fully intended to do what was asked of him. Gideon's question was concerning his own capabilities and whether or not he was adequately able to receive revelation by the still small voice. He heard the message but wanted assurance that he'd interpreted it correctly. In his humble and inadequate state, he couldn't imagine that God would want someone as weak as he to do such important work. He was willing to go to the ends of the earth if that was truly what God wanted of him. He just needed to be sure that such was truly what God wanted. Again, entirely different than the sign seeking Sherem or Korihor were engaged in. Helaman sought and received assurances before taking his stripling army into battle[18]. The 16 glowing stones of the Jaredites surely assured them that God was with them, not unlike the pillar and cloud that stood before Israel in the Wilderness. Those manifestations were all intended for comfort and guidance to those who were willing to do the will of God and just needed a little encouragement

to help them overcome the weakness of the flesh. There was no manipulation in them, or in those who looked to them for strength.

While God clearly hopes we'll have thought our position through and that we be prepared to defend it, He is not in the haggling, negotiating for the best deal, business. As a good friend puts it, "God isn't running a Trading Post." He knows what's best and is uncompromising in His position of truth and wisdom. This is not to say that He cannot be negotiated with. Joseph Smith and Martin Harris, for reasons of personal advantage, negotiated with God until he granted that the Book of Mormon manuscript be shown to scholars. It appears that He did so because Joseph especially, need more work in the trust and surrender department. I don't think Heavenly Father would have budged, had the consequences reached into the lives of innocent others. While it might have, God, in his wisdom had long before planned to keep the damage confined to those for whom the lesson was intended. The Father doesn't manipulate us; neither should we attempt to manipulate Him. Manipulation is the devil's tool; not God's.

The Lord doesn't do guilt trips; that lies in Satan's realm and satisfies his selfish purposes. God invites us to follow. He allows us the choice. He does provide consequences but not to somehow satisfy Him; but rather to satisfy justice. God doesn't brow beat us and encourage us to feel shame and guilt. Rather, He invites us to let Him help us clean up our messes and escape from shame and guilt.

I did not always see things that way. Having been raised by manipulators I quite naturally attributed those same characteristics to God. It is the most natural thing in the world to assume that God is somehow just like our mortal parents. The thing is, the natural man is an enemy to God. If our parents are manipulators, chances are we assume God is too. Let me assure you He is not a manipulator. His work and his glory are to bless his children, not to bring credit and honor to His own name. He was willing to sacrifice His only begotten Son for the express purpose of facilitating our freedom, growth and development; for our benefit, not His. In doing so God rejected the manipulative plan of Lucifer whose only object was to aggrandize himself. When we as parents exercise unrighteous dominion over our children we are exercising manipulation and are re-subscribing to a plan and method we once rejected. In doing so we are *not* following the example of our Eternal Parent.

Chapter Nine – Trust

The wounds of manipulation destroy trust. Lack of trust is why people don't change. Broken trust is a scalding, instant pain much like touching a hot stove. We are reticent to ever feel it again and so we carefully guard against it. No one likes the pain of disappointment that comes of broken promises and violated trust. We are quick to put up walls and barriers. We put on oven mitts before coming near the danger again. We shore up our defenses or cower down in our hidey holes and refuse to come out until we're certain the coast is clear. Is it any wonder we are so hard to reach? How are we to distinguish the trustworthy from those who'll selfishly hurt us again? No one wants to be vulnerable when the cost of a mistake can hurt so badly. To attempt a change in our lives is to come out of our fortifications into that scary world. It is hard to let ourselves become that vulnerable again.

While serving at the Detention Center, I had a remarkable compatriot. His name is Darwin. The youth just loved him. More than a year after his being called elsewhere, the kids still inquire after him. The thing that made Darwin so special was that he was vulnerable. He hid nothing from them, including his tears. It is a hard and vulnerable thing to weep in front of others. Some will not understand. Some will judge and tease and say hurtful things. Darwin has felt the sting of such unkindness many times, but he refuses to withdraw to a King's X where he'll be safe from that. Why? Because Darwin knows that in order to draw wounded people out of the turtle shell of safety they've grown around themselves they have to trust. Darwin also knows that trust begets trust. He trusts the kids to keep his confidences. He trusts them to not make fun of his weakness. He takes a huge risk. But, he thinks it's worth it, because they sense that if Darwin feels safe out there, maybe they might be too. They test the waters in Darwin's presence and nothing happens, so out they come and bask in the sunshine a while. When he's not there, they usually draw back into their shells, but they risk it when he's around because they know that even if they get stung, it will also sting Darwin and they'll deal with it together.

I think that one of the greatest gifts parents can give their children is to be willing to be vulnerable in their presence. My own dear Father had a difficult time being vulnerable. He was a very capable accomplished man. He appeared to me to be perfect so I could, in no way relate to him. He, like most parents was also a manipulator and was the cause of much of my pain. I never dared cry in his presence except when he took a belt to my backside. In that case the wails and tears were indicative that he'd done his job. I realize now that the society he lived in had manipulated him into conformity and that breaking out of that mold was just as difficult for him as it is for me.

Long after my father had passed away, I had a sacred moment with him which is too special to describe here. Let me just say that he came to me and showed me

his weakness in a very vulnerable way. My discovery of his humility, humanity and willingness to expose his weakness to me, was quite possibly the most cathartic experience of my life. How wonderful that the Lord, in his mercy, saw me holed up in my shell and chose to allow my father to be the one to come and draw me out. I can only imagine how healing it was for Dad as well.

Once my father was able to show me a different pattern of parenthood, I began to be willing to trust my Father in Heaven as well. I love a little story told by Cheiko Okasaki in her book *Lighten Up!* There she describes a hypothetical situation in which Jesus might show up at your door for a visit. He is welcome in the tidy part of the house but, in this story, kept from the kitchen where things aren't just right. I just went back and reread that chapter in the book. It is not at all like I remember it. It seems, that I have subconsciously, rewritten the story to more accurately reflect my own weakness and circumstance. It rather amused me to discover how I had embellished her sweet simple story with details of my own. Here's how the story goes in my mind's version:

I get a card in the mail indicating that Jesus would like to come visit me on the following afternoon. I realize that I'll be hard pressed to make all the preparations. The note says he'll arrive at 4:30 PM, so I assume he'll want to stay for supper. I look at my calendar and see that my evening is booked at the Detention Center and that my morning has something too. I think I can get to the store on the way back from that morning engagement and will probably have time to clean up the messy kitchen and fix a meal in the remaining time. I go about my life a little harried, a little worried.

My morning meeting goes long. The lines are long at the grocery store. As I come in the driveway a neighbor flags me down with an emergency across the street that requires my attention. I make it into the house two hours late and some of the food has spoiled in the hot car. I'll have to go to plan B as I can't fix spoiled food for the Savior. I'm just rolling up my sleeves to tackle three days of neglected dishes when the door bell rings. I rush to answer it and find to my horrified dismay that He has arrived early!

Flustered I escort Him to the Home Teaching Room, move the morning paper off the best chair and invite Him to sit. I make a few apologies, mingled with excuses and ask if he'd like some refreshment? I explain that I'll be leaving Him there while I go tidy up a bit and get dinner on, whereupon, according to Dixon's version, I hand Him a Bible to read while he waits.

Oh boy, now I have to stop and interject some explanation about Dixon. Dixon is a Native American fellow who has spent the past two years as my companion at the Detention Center. He was seriously injured in a drunk-driving accident years ago. He spent eight months in a coma and now has some disability. His left side is partially paralyzed and his speech is difficult to understand. He's especially limited in speaking long sentences and gets completely muddled with paragraphs. The result is that he's become a master of the one liner.

Dixon has a deep understanding of the gospel. He has a grateful, happy outlook on

life. Add to that a superior sense of humor and a flawless sense of timing and you get, well, the best teaching companion. My lessons became drum rolls punctuated by Dixon's rim shots.

Such was the case when, telling the above story to the kids in DT, I came to that part where I was awkwardly seating the Savior of the World in my drawing room and attempting to see to his needs. I was just saying how I was about to leave him there with a magazine when Dixon interjected, "Bible!"

See what I mean? With one word, Dixon summarized my whole message. We laughed and laughed at the stupidity of thinking that we in any way could presume to meet Jesus' needs, especially with something He'd given to meet ours!

Now, back to the story: As I'm about to leave, Jesus asks if He might come into the kitchen and help! "Oh, of course not!" I protest. "I could never let you see my messy kitchen!"

He kindly explains that He'd rather help and that He's good at it. Still I protest, but He patiently persists. Finally, I reluctantly agree. I'm sure that when He sees the mess there will be recriminations, "This place is a pig sty! How can you live like this?"

Instead, He quietly, patiently rolls up His sleeves and goes to work beside me. In the end I imagine a pleasant after noon of cooking and cleaning and pleasant conversation.

Actually, this story is not all imagination. In order to recover from my addiction, I had to do exactly what I've described. All my life I had left the Lord alone in the tidy parts of my soul. Never inviting Him in where He might do some good. It was a difficult day when I swung to doors wide and meekly invited Him in to see the messy parts. They were far worse than a few days' undone dishes. My "kitchen" was a filthy, stinking can of worms. Still, there was no condemnation just an invitation to join Him in cleaning up the mess. He is very good at what He does. That kind of trust, that kind of vulnerability is not easy to come by. I think it is what the scriptures call being circumcised of heart; the willingness to become utterly vulnerable in order to become clean and enter the covenant.

So, if we are afraid and walled in, how do we get the courage to step out into the light and take the risk of trusting again? I don't know if there is a magic formula. Some go there because they are smothering in their fortress and are driven out for air. Others get exposed for who they really are and once exposed decide to face their humiliation and do something about it. Others, finding someone they can truly trust, with whom their confidence has grown over time, may trust their confidant and accept an invitation to emerge from their prison/shelter. Remember, manipulation has driven them there; manipulation will not bring them back. No selfish effort on my part is going to initiate trust and vulnerability on the part of another.

Chapter Ten – Manipulating Ourselves

We have already established that the primary response to a manipulator is to lie. It follows then that if we lie to ourselves we are manipulating ourselves. We can and are quite adept at self deceit. Why do we do this? Why do we attempt to justify the choices we are making? Why do we, sometimes quite successfully, convince ourselves that right is wrong and wrong is right?

In my own case, I loved to use the justice scale to justify misbehavior and satisfy a guilty conscience. I had myself persuaded that if my good deeds out-weighed my bad deeds that the scales would be tipped in my favor. There were plenty of people around me we were more than willing to help me entrench that lie. The truth is, “no unclean thing can enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.” The lie I told myself was unproductive and dangerous as any I have ever heard. I went along, quite merrily under the umbrella of that lie.

For a time I was Stake Mission President in my Stake. I was determined to be successful in my calling. I needed the reassurance that I had done well. I needed the accolades that would accompany success such as I enjoyed. I was, at the same time actively participating in my addiction. Occasionally, I felt guilt sufficient to bring me to the Bishop or Stake President. I would confess and then cite my merits in my calling as evidence that I was turning over a new leaf. It was an easy sell. This brings me to the second lie I told myself, which led to a lie that I told others. I decided it was sufficient to confess to my Priesthood Leaders in generalities. I justified leaving out much of the detail. I didn’t want to admit some of my misbehavior to myself, let alone to my Bishop. Addiction is like that. And the first remedy to addiction is honesty. I couldn’t even honestly admit that I was powerless over my addiction and that I had forfeited my agency with regard to my behavior. I lied to myself when I told myself that I would quit someday, later. In my heart of hearts I knew I was utterly unable to quit.

I lied to myself when I told myself that the only person I was hurting was me. It was an easy lie to pass off on me because I was so focused on myself that I was completely unaware of the harm I was causing those around me.

Every effort I made to quit was done by manipulation. I would attempt elaborate means to avoid using. I would force myself to be in good company. I would destroy my stash so I couldn’t get what I needed. I would ride herd on myself and employ others by various means to chaperon me as well. I would commit myself to busy work as a distraction. There were times when I had elaborate charts I had to fill out incessantly in an effort to trick myself into righteous behavior. I would put on a righteous image and hold myself up as a good example so that I might be forced to live up to the expectations I had helped others have of me. It was all lies

and deceit and it didn't work.

Every effort I made to use (abuse) was also manipulation. I would tell myself that I could use after I had done my Home Teaching; trading good for bad, so to speak. I would allow myself harmless indulgences so I could ease myself closer to the edge of all out abandonment. I would select good things to do that were proximate to the bad ones, so I could peek over the fence if you will.

I often ran away from sin, but I always left a forwarding address. It was always a lie and it was continual hell. Well did Lehi speak when he said, "Wo unto the liar for he shall be thrust down to hell." [19] It isn't wo unto the liar for he is entering the road to hell, or wo unto the liar for he might not get his temple recommend. The term thrust has a sense of immediacy and forceful certainty; and so it is. The lie, whether expressed to another or to one's self brings immediate separation from God. It also perpetuates the pain and suffering we bring upon ourselves by our dishonesty. The lie is the vehicle by which we arrive most immediately in hell. Hell is not a place. It is a state of being. If you think you can lie and avoid the miserable and captivating consequences; you are telling yourself the biggest lie of all.

Why do we manipulate ourselves? Could it be that we don't know any other way? We are so commonly manipulated that we naturally assume that since the only way others can get us to perform is by manipulation; it must be the means by which we must get ourselves to perform. We also assume that God too, is a manipulator which is the most heinously lie we could ever presume.

The notion of self manipulation rather implies the duality of our nature. The natural man is an enemy to God. The natural man trust's Satan. Satan manipulates. This duality is wonderfully expressed in the Robert Louis Stevenson's classic *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. I'm not a literary scholar. I have no idea what Stevenson was trying to convey in his work. What I do know, is that when I read his story, I related very much to Dr. Jekyll's predicament. I was in the same situation, though not chemically induced. There were two opposing components to my personality. And each one was very busy manipulating the other. This inner conflict was devastating. I acted like two different people. For some time I actually wondered if I weren't schizophrenic!

I dealt with this dualism the best I could for too many years. It was the chief component of the insanity that is addiction. Then one day I heard a story. You have probably heard it too in one or another of its many manifestations. I've since encountered so many versions that I have no idea who to credit for its brilliance and for the blessing it has been in my life. Here is a sweet and simple version that concisely makes the point:

A Cherokee Legend

An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life. "A fight is going on inside me,"

he said to the boy.

"It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil - he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego." He continued, "The other is good - he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you - and inside every other person, too."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?"

The old Cherokee simply replied, "The one you feed."

Truer words were never spoken. I learned to feed the good wolf within me and to starve the bad one. After a while, the fighting ceased. The bad wolf, too weak to fight, has, for the most part slinked off to some far corner of my personality to hide. Subtly, Satan tries to get me to slip a scrap of food to him here and there and I need to be very careful to give good and regular nutrition to the good wolf, but it sure beats feeding them both and dealing with the constant conflict, the constant manipulation.

The other day, friend and author Louise Penny wrote of a mourning friend (also Louise) in her blog:

Spoke to Louise last night and again this morning. She's very funny. Said that for the past year, when Jacques' health took a nose-dive, she got used to doing various things...a routine. That grew more and more exhausting. Til at the end she said she'd get out of bed, drag herself down the hall murmuring to herself, 'Time to make the doughnuts. Time to make the doughnuts.'

A reference to an old TV commercial about a doughnut maker who got up at the crack of dawn and like a zombie went about his work. 'Time to make the doughnuts.'

Everyday, for weeks and months, that was how she felt, and that was what she mumbled to herself.

Until yesterday. She said one of the hardest things was not going to the hospital. She actually drove by it...slowing down. But didn't stop.

Mostly, though, she's decided to not run away from the pain in frantic activity. Or even in television. But to sit quietly, and feel it completely. And then, one day, to feel it ease. She knows the only way to really let something go is to own it first. And she has the courage to do that. At least for today.

Louise has made a mature, healthy choice to refrain from manipulating herself by running or distracting herself from her pain. Addicts manipulate themselves all the time for that very reason. The use of drugs, alcohol, food, porn or whatever, is the worst form of manipulation, by which we lie to ourselves and avoid, rather than deal with the vicissitudes of life. Well did Louise Penny observe that I must honestly own a problem before I can let it go.

Chapter Eleven – Life without Manipulation and Fear

So what does life without manipulation look like? May I suggest you study the life of Christ? More specifically, might we study His teachings as in the Sermon on the Mount?

Remember, manipulation always has a selfish motive. Jesus' motives were never selfish. He was motivated by love. His entire life and very meaning of His death were motivated by love for His spiritual brothers and sisters. Everything He taught said the same wonderful message. There is no selfish motive in the Good Samaritan or servant who magnified his Talent. There is no manipulation in healing the sick or raising the dead. Often he invited those He blessed to "tell no man."

There was no ulterior or insidious motive in rescuing the woman taken in adultery, nor in his invitation to her to go her "way and sin no more." There is no manipulation in turning the other cheek or going the second mile or loving your neighbor as yourself. Finding your life is about manipulation and that is why Jesus invited us to lose our lives in the service of other.

If we will pattern our lives after that of Christ we will learn to avoid the harm and danger of manipulation.

I had been reading the Beatitudes one time when I was issued a challenge. A Young Men President from a neighboring Stake challenged me to a contest to see who could get the best attendance at Scout Round Table each month. I had been impressed with Jesus' teachings and wanted to put them to the test. I didn't discuss my approach with my friend. He just went his way and I went mine, or rather the Lord's.

My friend and a member of his Stake Presidency who were both avid Scouters devised a plan to have competitive attendance. Their method was to go to Round Table, roll in hand and, counting heads, determine who was not there. Then they went into the lobby and phoned all of the absentees strongly encouraging them to be there. I never listened to those phone conversations, nor did I hear what was said when these two brethren upped the ante by actually leaving the meeting and going to their homes to drag the "slackers" out. So, I can only imagine the methods they used to be manipulative. Guilt trips, scolding and shaming are distinct possibilities.

Consulting the Lord's teachings I set upon another plan. I decided to send individual invitations to each man who might benefit from the meeting. I explained the purpose of the meeting and what they might gain by attending. Then I went to the meeting, participated and helped to see that it was a beneficial use of the participants' time. I too, took roll to see who had not attended, but my purpose was different. I wanted to gather handouts and take notes for each absent brother so I could convey the information that he had missed to him personally. I took a day or two to transcribe my notes and personalize a packet for each missing brother. Then, I personally took each brother his packet. I would ring the door bell and when answered say something like, "We had a wonderful Round Table the other night. I was sorry you couldn't make it and was sure you'd want to know what you missed. I've prepared this little folder full of material from the meeting that I think you'll find beneficial in your program."

I then thanked the brother for his wonderful service to the young men in his charge and praised him for his valiant efforts and left.

My friends from the other Stake really kicked my tail for the first couple of months. They also got wind of my method and scoffed; saying that I was going to turn my brethren in to little dependent pansies who would learn to take advantage of their patsy of a leader, for everything, while never learning to stand on their own two feet.

How surprised we all were when my, non-manipulated group began to turn up in far greater numbers than theirs. Their method began to fail because those brethren soon learned to hide from the sheep dogs who were attempting to drive them to the meeting. They wouldn't answer their phones and made it a point to be away from the house on that particular night each month. Their roundup to Roundtable began to be a disaster.

In the meantime, my brethren felt safe in coming. They weren't under any kind of threat, or burdened by any measure of guilt. The packets proved useful and the invitations to attend in person began to make sense. Those brethren knew they were loved and appreciated for their service in a difficult job and came to realize that I and those at Round Table were only trying to make their task easier to perform. They became willing to follow their shepherd.

I must admit that this was just an experiment at first. I was not at all certain that it would work. I will also admit that being a neutral observer was difficult, but I was determined not to taint the results by resorting to my old manipulative methods. No one was more surprised than I to see the miraculous results that came of this experiment. I am happy to report that I became a whole hearted convert in the process and will ever be grateful for the blessing of having tried to pattern my behavior after that of the Master. I can only wonder how much better I might have done if I had *believed* in the beginning instead of, in a measure, faking it. Thankfully, by the end of the process, I didn't have to fake it any more.

This and myriad other opportunities to pattern my life after the Savior have taught me, line upon line and precept upon precept, to remove manipulation from my life. I don't need the credit for anyone's praiseworthy deeds, not even my own. I have learned to give the glory to God, for truly it is He who permits, empowers and guides my worthy efforts.

Now, let me offer a few observations about frustration. Have you noticed the more entrenched the Control Freak, the more frustrated he is? For him life is his way or the highway. Sound familiar? Sounds just like the original Control Freak to me. Don't forget Satan had his choice just like everyone else and in the end he chose the highway. He's been ranting and raving about it ever since. Trying to take control always leads to frustration. Confound it anyway!

What a blessing I have found frustration to be. For me it is a red flag. Every time I get frustrated it's a sure fire signal that I'm attempting again to take control. Usually a cursory look around will reveal who I'm trying to manipulate this time. The more sensitive I have become to this little signal, the less carnage I have caused.

Let me tell you how I made this most revealing discovery about myself. I had been in recovery from my addiction for about 18 months. All of a sudden one day, without any conscious thought, I found myself in the middle of full blown binge. I woke up with the realization like it was a bad dream, only it wasn't. I couldn't have been more surprised if I'd been broadsided by a truck while going through a green light at a remote intersection! I was devastated. I had gone so long without using and had, for the most part, been remarkably free of temptation as well. It had been so wonderful to be free!

I crawled back to the Lord, begged forgiveness, expressed my dismay and confusion and began working the 12 Steps again. When I got to step four I worked really hard at identifying what weakness had taken me back down. After weeks of soul searching and self examination I made a remarkable discovery. I had not fallen off the wagon on the day that I used again. I fell off three weeks earlier when I had reclaimed control of my life from the God I had given it to.

On that earlier day, a daughter had made a decision of serious and very negative and disappointing consequences. I immediately reacted with anger, frustration and disappointment. Not because of her, but because of how her decision was going to affect me and my reputation and my ego. I went right out and began decorating for the pity party I would eventually hold three weeks later.

I am mortified that I never once considered what she was going through, what pain had caused her rash decision, what anguish might be racking her soul. No, I was too caught up in her defiance of my wishes, and how it was all going to affect me. I had not realized it then, but had spent the entire three weeks, decorating, arranging caterers, venues and entertainment for the pity party that somehow turned out to be a surprise party for the planner.

Nobody in recovery likes a relapse. But everyone who relapses and learns from it will express appreciation for the lessons learned. So it is with me. I learned loud, clear and indelibly that frustration is the first sign of coming destruction and that the only way to stop the train is to stop, turn around, face the Lord and relinquish the control I was trying to usurp. Relinquish it to Him, no one else, just He who can be fully entrusted with it.

Once I sobered up and surrendered my will to the Lord, again; I realized that I had not even considered my daughter or her pain. The manifest frustration followed by manipulative intervention and then the subsequent neglect had further alienated her. She was difficult to reach. She had closed the shutters and barred the doors to her heart for fear of further hurt, this time at my hands. I had to stop being in control. I had to stop manipulating. I began by outlining my error and begging for forgiveness for my selfishness. My willingness to be candid and vulnerable resulted in a tongue lashing, a release of a lot of pent up anger and pain. I took it. I deserved it.

Next I asked, like Dr. Lund, "What on earth has hurt you so badly that you would choose to act this way? When she told me, my heart burst with sorrow and compassion. She had indeed been terribly hurt by mean and manipulative friends whose only purpose was to satisfy personal egos and curiosity. Add to that the hurt caused by a self-centered and uncaring father and you have a formula for disaster. I plead for forgiveness for not being there for her in her time of need. Not only had her friends rejected her, but her father had abandoned her.

It has taken us a long long time to treat and heal those deep infected wounds.

What a priceless lesson. What a horrible cost.

This chapter is about life without manipulation and fear. I confessed this most shameful story to teach one point. Let frustration be your red flag. Pray that Father will make you sensitive and aware of it at its first emergence. There is only one explanation for frustration – manipulation. That little red flag should have a message printed in bold letters across the crimson, "You are a Selfish Manipulator – Quit it!" At least that's what mine says.

Do you suppose the folks who mourned the loss of a brick on the Tower of Babel were frustrated? Do you suppose when the ovens of Auschwitz couldn't keep up with the trains, Hitler got frustrated? Do you suppose that when my wife expressed no desire to go on a mission, I got frustrated? What about when the living room floor is covered with Legos? Do you get frustrated? Why? Are you thinking about them? Or are you thinking about you?

I took the Scouts to Summer Camp one year. To motivate them I acquired pretty wonderful prizes they might win. Each time I caught a Scout doing something good or well I would give him a colorful polished stone. I put the prizes on display and told them that the one with the most stones at the end of the week would get his choice of the prizes. There were knives, binoculars, compasses, stuff like that. They were motivated. I thought I was encouraging them, motivating them. At the

end of the week a conflict arose between two groups of the boys. Tempers flared and when the time came for the counting of stones and the awarding of prizes, no one wanted to participate. Their anger was still seething. One boy had even run off into the dark woods to be away and alone. Of course I had to go after him. I stumbled around the forest for a half hour realizing that I'd only find him if he wanted to be found. I sat down on a log frustrated. All my plans, hopes, dreams for this activity were heading down the drain. I was frustrated. After some contemplative time, I decided to pray. First I prayed for the young man, that he wouldn't be lost and would respond to my calls. Then I prayed for my plan that it would come to fruition. Then I sat a while and listened. What I heard, in my heart, surprised me. There in the woods, I learned that my motivation for the stones and prizes had been a selfish one. I wanted cooperation. I wanted success and the resulting praise. I wanted to be the coolest Scoutmaster on the mountain.

Somehow, through all the selfishness the Lord reached me and informed me that He had a better plan and that from what appeared to me to be disaster, He was going to create a masterpiece. I felt impressed to go to the picnic table in camp and just sit there. I did. Eventually, someone approached and asked if I weren't going to bed.

"No," I said.

"Why not? It's late," the scout informed me.

"It is," I said, "But I have a job to do and I'm going to stay here until it is done."

The boy left. I could hear murmuring in the tents. Eventually, the two groups wandered reluctantly to the table and joined me in silence. Two boys were still missing. We waited. Finally, out of the darkness they emerged and joined. Sullen looks remained on most of the faces.

I still had a bunch of stones left in a box. I informed the boys that I had gone about the program all wrong and that I wanted their stones back. They handed them in without complaint. I handed the box to the eldest boy, the one who'd left camp. The one who'd bossed everyone around all week. The one who'd precipitated the rebellion. I asked him to distribute the stones as he saw fit. He declined. I passed them to the next boy and he accepted the assignment. I told him that there was only one stipulation. He couldn't give a stone without a positive and bonafide reason, which he must express to the group. He took off without flinching and gave stones to every boy in the group. Then to my surprise that young man offered the same opportunity to the next boy. Pretty soon they'd complimented one another around the circle giving love and support freely to one another. Before long, tears began to be shed. The Spirit was felt in abundance.

One of the interesting things was that toward the end of the process, boys began to bear their testimonies to one another of the feelings this little exercise was causing in their hearts. To my surprise, the eldest and to some degree, most obnoxious, wound up with far and away the most stones. This little phenomenon changed the way he felt about his peers for years to come.

I shudder to think that I might have, in my selfish frustration, forced the situation and destroyed any chance that this little miracle could have taken place. While I was certainly selfish in my desires, I think it is wonderful that my shiny stones didn't do the trick until the Lord stretched forth His finger and made them glow in the hearts of some of his worthy sons. This can only be done if we will acknowledge our own weakness, anticipate the Lord's divine assistance and then get out of the way. We can only do that if we are thinking of others and not of ourselves. My original method was one of manipulation. God's method was one of freedom, responsibility, love and selflessness. What a difference can be found in the result.

Chapter 12 – Whatever it Takes – Making Amends

In 2006 I read a headline for a book review of The Hook. It read:

COVER- 'I harmed you': 21 years, 12 steps later, rape apology backfires

It was about that rather famous case of William Beebe and Liz Seccuro. In college Beebe had raped Seccuro. He had not been convicted. 20 years later, struggling with alcoholism Beebe, in a bid to make amends wrote Seccuro and asked for forgiveness. She did not forgive him, but rather sent him to jail. Liz remains bitter and angry and William, according to one report is moving on, having done what he could to make amends.

Now, there is a lot of controversy surrounding this case. I have no intention of choosing up sides. Seccuro has every right to refuse forgiveness. Beebe was making an attempt to recover from Alcoholism and in doing his step work was

responding to Step 8: *Make a list of people you have harmed.* And then Step 9: *Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.* I'm not going to discuss whether or not his amends was advisable as Seccuro was bitter about the reopening of old wounds. Nor am I going to criticize her response.

What I want to discuss here is the supposition that Beebe's attempt at amends backfired. If Beebe's amends were sincere, with no intent to do harm; and if he was willing to do whatever it took to make those amends; and if in the end he finds healing from the guilt and damage he inflicted on himself, while harming her, it is all he can do and is enough. If in the end, he finds the healing he needs, the process has not backfired, has not failed him, but has helped him move on.

Those who are working Steps 8 and 9 are counseled to let go of the outcome. We who have done wrong and harmed another, all of us, need to be willing to do whatever is in our power to make restitution for the crimes we commit. Of course there are things we cannot restore, like a person's virtue and feeling of safety and well-being. Such things as Beebe stole from Seccuro. He must do what he can, but he has no control over her response. One account I read of this incident indicated that Beebe knew, going in that incarceration might be an outcome. Still, he was willing to do whatever it took to make amends. He also offered to reimburse his victim for therapy costs she may have incurred. The offer was greeted with accusations of bribery. I can't judge which it was. But if he was sincere, it still didn't matter what her response was, he was doing what he could.

This is an important story. We all mistreat others, hopefully not as heinously as Beebe mistreated Seccuro. We also all get mistreated. The consequence, in either case exacts a heavy toll. Only through being willing to do whatever it takes to resolve the problem can we find the healing we seek – even if that means prison.

Now, Seccuro is not responsible for what happened to her. Even so, she has been deeply hurt by it. She too, can personally benefit by seeking and giving forgiveness. She didn't create her problem or its consequences, but she must own it. What Beebe did was for his own healing, not for hers. It is she who must take the steps to do whatever is necessary to recover from the damage Beebe has done to her.

Now, one final and very important concept in this process; it is Jesus Christ who ultimately forgives and heals. This is critical to Beebe as he has broken things he cannot fix. It is also critical for Seccuro, who requires the healing touch of the master too. Part of that healing for her, will require that she eventually find forgiveness for her assailant. Jesus said, "I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will

forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men.” He doesn’t expect us to somehow conjure that up from within our own guts. He offers that peace as we humbly accept His forgiveness for our own transgressions. As a wise man once put it, “He who refuses to forgive, burns the bridge over which he too must cross.”

The making of amends and the offering of forgiveness go hand in hand. You cannot have one without the other. They are like the two blades of a pair of scissors, useful only in tandem.

Chapter 13 – What would you have me do? Bonnie’s Story

My dear friend Bonnie tells a wonderful story. With her permission, I’ll share it with you. About 15 years ago, the authorities found her living in a car with three young children, in the middle of the winter. She was broke and hopelessly hooked on drugs and alcohol. DCFS collected her children and Bonnie was sent to jail. After completing her sentence she approached the Judge to petition for the reestablishment of custody of her children. The judge ruled that she was in no condition to care for them. He told her that he would give her one year to get herself cleaned up at which point he would reevaluate her competence to care for the kids. He informed her that at that point, if she failed to qualify, the children would be put up for adoption as he didn’t want them to remain in an unsettled situation any longer than was absolutely necessary.

Bonnie began to attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. At first, she thought she could serve two masters and that the mere collection of attendance signatures would be sufficient to persuade the judge. As she often puts it, “If you hang out in

a barber shop long enough, you'll get a haircut. She hung out in AA meetings long enough to catch hold and began to enjoy sobriety. She worked the 12 Steps and accumulated a number of months of sobriety. Finally the end of her probationary year arrived. It was time to go see the judge about obtaining custody of her children. With a mother's love she desired to have her children.

That morning, Bonnie got on her knees and prayed the Eleventh Step Prayer, "Lord, what would You have me do today? Please give me the strength to do it?" She had become accustomed to offering that prayer. It was key to her recovery. That prayer, offered by addicts everywhere, implies personal revelation. She received some. In her heart she heard her Father instruct her to trust Him. She responded by saying, "Lord, you know I desire custody of my children. I desire it with all my heart. But I am placing them in Your hands. Please do what is best for my children? If I am not fit to raise them; if they would be better off with someone else, please grant what is best for them?" Bonnie, had grown a lot in that year. She had learned to trust. You'll notice that there wasn't even a hint of manipulation in her dealings with the Lord, nor with the judge. She had learned to surrender her will to that of God.

She went before the judge who, after careful consideration, determined that Bonnie could not have her children and that they would be immediately placed for adoption.

Now, if Bonnie were not fully in recovery, she would have gone home and got stoned. In a pity party, she would have justified her indulgence and would have verified the judge's suspicion of her fitness for motherhood. Bonnie was in recovery however, and instead, went home and humbly knelt before her Great Benefactor and thanked Him for His wisdom in caring for her children. She acknowledged His wisdom and prayed for continued blessings to sustain her beloved boys. She sought His comfort in her sorrow and accepted the circumstances as the natural consequences of her choices. She continued trusting God, who had miraculously delivered her from the bondage of drug and alcohol addiction.

Three weeks later, Bonnie received a phone call. It was the judge. "Bonnie, I've lost a lot of sleep over you the past week. Could you come to see me in my office? After a lengthy interview, the judge reversed his order and returned Bonnie's children to her custody, where they have remained for 15, glorious, sober years.

Remember the gentile woman who would accept even the crumbs from the Master's table? Remember what Jesus said to her? "O woman, great *is* thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." Bonnie had wholly submitted her will to that of the Father, which was, as Elder Boyd K. Packer put it, to possess it all the more.

Chapter 14 – Trust God’s timing – Bonnie’s other story

Now for the rest of Bonnie’s story. At the time of her recovery she was completely inactive in the church. She had found God through AA, and considered that to be good enough. She grew in her recovery and had come to Step 12 wherein she continued to practice the principles of recovery and began sharing them with others in need. She became an instrument in God’s hands in helping others find their way out of the bonds of addiction.

Each day she continued to pray the Eleventh Step Prayer. She had been sober for four years. One morning as she prayed, “What would you have me do today Lord?” she got a very specific answer.

“Pay your tithing.”

Bonnie was familiar enough with the Church to know what tithing was. She’d been baptized at eight and lived among Mormons most of her life. She had not been to church since childhood. She pled for the strength to pay her tithing and was blessed with the courage to sneak into the Meetinghouse during Sacrament Meeting when no one was looking whereupon she collected every tithing envelope and payment slip in the box outside the Bishop’s office. That way she could mail in her contribution without having to go into the building again for a long time.

Bonnie faithfully paid a full tithe thereafter.

Then, two years later, praying the Eleventh Step Prayer as she was still accustomed to do, Bonnie got this answer.

“Go to church.”

Again she responded with a plea for strength to carry out the will of the Lord. She went to church and has continued to go ever since. You’ll be interested to know that now she is fully active, attends the Temple regularly and the blessings of the

gospel have fully bloomed in her life.

I love to tell this story because of one very important message. God doesn't ask us to give what we do not have. Ever. He never gave up on Bonnie. Better yet, He always knew what she was prepared for. I'm sure there were those in Bonnie's life who wanted her to go to church years before she did; but God wasn't one of them. He knew when Bonnie would be prepared for such a request and He didn't make the request until that time. While we might have been impatient with Bonnie, God, who is infinitely patient and wise, was willing to wait until she was ready.

Do you find that as comforting as I do? For me that message has helped me to be willing to pray the Eleventh Step prayer myself. If I can trust that God will never ask me to give what I have not got; then I bear no risk in asking what it is He would like me to do. I am safe in the knowledge that He knows me personally and is only going to ask me to take the next step in my progression. He does not expect me or anyone else to leap from point A to point Z in a single bound. Sometimes the world expects that of us. Sometimes our parents, or Home Teachers, or even our Bishop becomes impatient with the slowness of our progress, but not God. I believe most of us could progress faster than we are and as Joseph Smith taught and living "far beneath our blessings," but I also believe that God doesn't expect us to give more than we've got. Oh, He will stretch us to be sure. That first day at church was way outside Bonnie's comfort zone, but she was given, at her own request, the strength to do it.

I love the eleventh step prayer. President Ezra Taft Benson, referring to Saul on the road to Damascus said this:

The constant and most recurring question in our minds, touching every thought and deed of our lives, should be "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6).[20]

It was true for President Benson, it was true for Paul and it is true for each of us.

Chapter 15 – Trusting God, with others

It is not uncommon in the business of addiction recovery to witness the horror of relapse on the part of another. We see the telltale signs. We try to intervene. We hope to stave off the inevitable and all too often we only exacerbate the problem. The truth remains that we each have our agency and it also remains that interfering with that agency is manipulative. I know, you're probably saying, "The definition of manipulation requires a self serving motivation on my part. I am not interested in myself; I am concerned about my friend." On the surface this may be true, but this chapter is about control and wanting to be in control is always self serving.

I remember when I first began attending 12 Step Meetings there was a great deal of angst about a particular individual who was dangerously falling off the wagon. That person did fall and wound up close to death in the emergency room. Weeks in rehab ensued and the individual returned to join our group with a whole new humility and presence. Not too many years passed before this person was a guiding light for the rest of us. Her precipitous fall and subsequent calamity had been just the thing she needed to set her on a solid path to recovery. Where she was once casual in her efforts, she became serious and intense. She became an example to us all.

Then one day, another of our number began to show signs of relapse. Again panic seemed to be the order of the day. "How can we intervene?!"

It was then that it occurred to me that we were yet children in understanding the principles of recovery.

We had all come to accept Step One. We had willingly admitted that we were powerless over our addiction and that our lives had become unmanageable. But, we had not realized that the same principle applied to our relationships with those around us. We needed to admit that *we* were powerless over *their* addiction and that *we* were utterly unable to manage the consequences of *their* behavior. Step one is admitting that I have a problem I can't fix and by extension, with regard to others; admitting too, that *they* have a problem *I* can't fix.

It follows then that Step Two also applies to others as well as us. We needed to come to believe that the Power and Atonement of Jesus Christ could not only restore us to complete spiritual health, but our friends and neighbors also.

Finally, Step three, we needed to turn *them* over to God, just like we had turned our own lives over to Him. We had learned we could trust ourselves to His care and keeping, but we were reluctant to do so with those around us.

It is a painful thing to accuse myself of manipulation. It is so easy to justify. I can tell myself until I am blue in the face that I am only seeking what is best for my daughter, or friend, or neighbor. But am I?

If I am acting out of fear; I am acting selfishly. Fear is selfish. Fear is an indicator that I want things to go my way and I am afraid they won't unless I or someone else does something.

What if, instead, I act in faith? What if I trust God? What if I truly believe that God loves His children and has their best interest in mind? What if I actually, willingly, trustingly, turn *all* of my problems over to His care and keeping? That is selfless, and there is no manipulation in it. That approach is based on the Plan of Salvation. That approach acknowledges the merits and mercy of Christ. That approach is born of testimony; of the belief that God loves our loved ones even more than we do. It is born of the conviction that it is indeed God's "work and glory to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." [21]

We often hear in 12 Step groups that "when the pain of the problem gets worse than the pain of the solution, you will change." This is so true. Too often, though, we find ourselves trying to help people avoid the pain that will inevitably cause the change of heart we seek for them. Consequences are a part of God's Plan for us. If we, in any way, try to help people avoid consequences their behavior warrants, we are delaying the day when they will reach their bottom and begin to seek the healing balm that will restore them to happiness.

While, there are those who through teaching and admonition, will choose to change before painful consequences humble them, there are many who will not. Thus it is important to teach and invite all to come unto Christ. But, for those who reject such admonition, it is also important to be willing to "let go and let God."

In my work with troubled teens I have often expressed the reality that addiction is a degenerative disease. I explain that addiction leaves a person with only three choices:

1. You can get better, or
2. You will become institutionalized, or

3. You will become dead.

Those are an addict's only options.

After number two, I always pointed out that lo and behold, here they were, in detention – institutionalized.

Teen agers are quite cynical at times. Having little desire to change and knowing they'd one day get out of the institution that held them captive they acted unscathed by the death prediction. Oh, they didn't deny it. All of them personally knew someone for whom death had been the premature outcome. Their attitude was more of a resigned, "So, that's that."

I always came back with, "No that's not all there is. If this kills you, which it may; you'll go to Hell. But when you wake up there don't be too discouraged because I'll be there too and we'll take up with the Twelve Steps there, right where we left off here." Whereupon, I always point out that Hell is God's Alternative High School. If we don't get it right here, we go to a place where we have an alternative means of learning life's lessons. (See Chapter Two)

God's plan is not going to be thwarted. He is a successful parent; one who loves each and every one of his children. Hope is not lost when the consequences seem too harsh. We often remind people of this and while extending a heartfelt invitation to come and be partakers of the Heavenly Gift.[22] "If you are not ready yet, be comforted in the knowledge that God will continue to prepare you so that you will, one day, be ready." Whether it is unfortunate that such preparation often requires affliction, or not; is just a matter of perspective. I personally consider the affliction that drove me to humility, to be the greatest blessing of my life.

In his book, *Odds Are, You're Going to Be Exalted*, Alonzo L. Gaskill reminds us:

"Even when we have the best of intents—the purest motives—we cannot discern others as God sees them....We are so prone to doubt, to doubt man's intent and ability to succeed—and to doubt God's divine plan for saving His children. Certainly most of us do not see ourselves as doubting the Lord. But, as it has been said, to despair is to turn one's back on God—to doubt Him and His promises. Thus, when we experience despair, fear, or worry, we are not exhibiting faith; we are manifesting, instead, our doubt." (page 84)

Then, when we doubt God, we seek to take matters into our own hands. We seek to control situations that are not ours to control and we wind up playing into Satan's hands as we manipulate matters toward our own ends.

Chapter 16 – The Choice is not Between Bondage and Freedom

We all have choices and we often struggle with them. We know what choices will make us happy and yet, for some mysterious reason we hesitate to make them. Why do we do that to ourselves? I found the answer in a very surprising place.

In her wonderful book *My Grandfather's Blessings* by Rachel Naomi Remen I found my answer. In the book Rachel reminisces about her childhood with her Grandfather. Grandfather was a Orthodox Jewish Rabbi who had been driven from Russia in the Pogroms of the early part of the last century. Rachel's parents had become Socialistic Atheists so Grandfather took every opportunity to teach Rachel about God. On one occasion he and Rachel attended a Seder at Passover. Too young to understand fully what the ritual meal was all about Grandfather sat her down and told her the story of the Exodus. He told her of the plight of the children of Israel. He told her of Moses seeking their deliverance from Pharaoh. He told her of the plagues and of Pharaoh's hardened heart which was finally softened by the plague that took the lives of the first born children of the Egyptian's. Here is the rest of the story in Rachel's own words:

"What happens next?"..."Well, Moses brings the news of their freedom to the rest." He told me. "Are the very happy, Grandpa?"

"No Neshume-le (Grandpa's term of endearment), they are not. They told Moses that they did not want to go. They asked many questions. Where are we going? Who will feed us? Where will we sleep? Moses was deeply surprised. He could not answer any of these questions and he did not know what to do..."

I was surprised..."But they were suffering, Grandpa. Why didn't they want to go?" My grandfather looked sad. "They knew how to suffer," he told me. "They had done it for a long time and they were used to it. They did not know how to be free..."

I was shocked. "But what about the Promised Land, Grandpa? Wasn't it true?"

"Yes it was true, Neshume-le, but the choice people have to make is never between slavery and freedom. We will always have to choose between slavery and the unknown..."

I sat for a while thinking of this story, my mind full of pictures. One of them was an image of a long ragged line of people, moving out from the land where they had lived for generations into the darkness and emptiness of the desert, with all their bundles of belongings, their dogs and their cats and their crying children. And at the head of this procession of complaining, worrying, and doubting people is God Himself, in the form of a Pillar of Fire.

"Why does God come Himself, Grandpa?"

"Ah Neshume-le, many people have puzzled over this question and have thought many different things. What I think is that the struggle toward freedom is too important for God to leave to others. And this is so because only the people who become free can serve God's holy purposes and restore the world. Only those who are not enslaved by something else can follow the goodness in them." [23]

I was thunderstruck by the truth of the dear Rabbi's observation. I was indeed afraid of the unknown. Aren't we all? We think we'd like to try freedom, but our hearts and minds are filled with unanswered questions. Will my friends reject me? Will I be happy? How will I fill my time? How will I face my problems? How will I deal with disappointment? Where can I turn for help? Who will feed me? The list is as infinite as our problems; a list that is inspired by Satan.

We don't know what to expect of freedom. It has been too long since we knew about it. I remember reading the biography of Viktor Belenko [24] who defected from the USSR during the cold war. At first he couldn't believe the results of freedom weren't just propaganda. When he finally accepted that he had a very hard time making decisions. He was completely unprepared to choose among clothes on a rack, or various cuts of meat, or what to do with his life. The shock of freedom eventually wore off as he became more accustomed to his new life. I can't imagine how fearful and difficult it must have been for Belenko to make the decision to flee his bondage. In many cases life in addiction and other oppressive circumstances must get just that miserable before we are willing to take such an enormous leap.

We do this to others as well. I have an acquaintance who was cohabitating with a friend. She became sober and free of her addiction. He had not. Someone asked

her why she hadn't encouraged his recovery. Eventually, she had to admit that she hadn't out of fear. "If he is sober what will he be like?" "Will he still need me? Love me?" She had stepped into part of her unknown, but remained afraid of the other.

We all resist change and fear is the reason. I conclude this chapter with a final quote from Rachel Naomi Remen:

The story my grandfather told me did not happen thousands of years in the past. It is happening now. It is the story of every...person I have ever known. It is my own story

The slavery that keeps us from following our goodness is an inner slavery. We are trapped by ideas of worthlessness and lack of self-esteem, by desire or greed or ignorance. Enslaved by notions of victimhood or entitlement. It is a story about the fear of change, about clinging to places and behaviors that are small and hurtful because letting go of them will mean facing something unknown. I heard again my grandfather's words: "The choice is never between slavery and freedom; we must always choose between slavery and the unknown."

Freedom is as frightening now as it was thousands of years ago. It will always require a willingness to sacrifice what is most familiar for what is most true. To be free we may need to act from integrity, on trust, sometimes for a long time. Few of us will reach our promised land in a day. But perhaps the most important part of the story is that God does not delegate this task. Whenever anyone moves toward freedom, God Himself is there.

Chapter 17 – Prayer

When we listen to the formal prayers given at church as well as those offered in family and other group settings, we tend to get the impression that our prayers must be that formal and carefully spoken. For me, the result was that I spent most of my life expressing in my prayers, those things I felt the Father wanted to hear. Not until much more recently did I discover that prayer should be much more intimate and disclosing than that.

Picture what you would express to a respected acquaintance compared with what you would tell your closest confidant. Personal prayer should be much more like the latter.

Only when we feel free to approach God with our deepest fears, our most intimate concerns, our broken hearts and our scariest confusion, can we fully address them with He who would deliver us.

I eventually discovered that I could only recover from addiction, by praying *while* I was using, not just during some remorseful moment afterward.

The first thing Adam and Eve did after they partook of the fruit was to hide from God. As ridiculous as that notion sounds, we do it all the time. And, like the ostrich with his head in the sand, we are much more exposed than we think we are. The purpose of full, open disclosure is for our benefit, not God's.

Of course we are ashamed of the circumstances we place ourselves in. Of course we'd rather God not know about it. God knowing about it is not at issue though. Certainly He knows. So, believing in Him and believing He can help, would we not be well served if we just approached Him and said, "Here I am again, doing something that I know Thou dost not approve of. It doesn't make me happy. I wish I could stop. Oh, Father, what is it that makes me so weak and irresponsible that I cannot quit this behavior. I am so sorry to offend Thee like this. I don't want to. It's as though I just can't help it. Could Thou please open my heart and mind to an understanding of my foolishness? Could Thou please grant me a measure of grace that I might overcome my natural inclinations?

I remember the first time I did this. It was as though my heart was a smelly can of worms. Figuratively, I ripped open my chest before God and said. "Okay, here it is. I'm ashamed of it. I wish it weren't so. I have no one to blame but myself. My heart is corrupt and I am mortified by it. But, here it is. Would Thou please change it? Clean it up? I can't. I've tried."

I was sitting in a Sunday meeting once when we were admonished to pray always. I had heard that admonition often in my life. That particular day though, it occurred to me that I was always having a conversation with myself. Why not, rather, have a conversation with God. Should that require more effort? I don't think so. In fact, practicing it, I have discovered that it actually requires less.

My conversations with myself are usually negative. Negative self-talk they call it. In AA they call it "stinkin' thinkin." Here's a recent example of how that works.

I happened to be driving down the road and noticed someone wave at me. My automatic response, of course, was to wave back; which I did. Then the conversation started in my head: "That was a nerdy wave. You've got to come up with a cooler wave than that!"

I spent the next several miles in the car practicing a "cool" wave and berating myself for being such a nerd.

Had I been conversing with God instead of myself, I'd likely have had a much more positive, productive conversation. For one thing, God is not about comparisons. It probably doesn't affect Him at all if I'm a nerd.

The morning after making this discovery I determined to put it into practice. I determined that I would converse with God all day and never with myself. Easier said, than done. Still I was determined to try and though I quite often had to reorient myself to my new purpose, I did converse with God a good deal more that day. A good deal more than I ever have. I began to see myself as Tevye from *The Fiddler on the Roof*. I consider him a good example of constant prayer – constant conversation with God.

I was working that day as a delivery driver. As I approached one of my stops I came to realize that I was going to be in an awkward situation with my "constant prayer." This particular stop was a business who had hired a very attractive receptionist. Other women in the organization were openly displeased that the boss had placed a sexy "ornament" at the front desk. They felt that her only purpose was to attract ogling men to the enterprise. They were probably right. It is difficult to admit, but I had been one such. She did not dress modestly and she seemed to enjoy being ogled. Each day as I approached her desk with packages and requested her signature my conversation with myself was one that embarrasses me to recall.

On this particular day, though, I wasn't having a conversation with myself. I was being accompanied on my rounds with my companion, the Holy Ghost. I was conversing with Him. As I approached the front desk I found myself explaining to God that I was uncomfortable with the situation, given my track record. I felt the Spirit point out that she was a daughter of God and that objectifying her was just as displeasing as I knew it to be. When I handed her my clipboard I turned slightly to look elsewhere. When she returned it I looked into her eyes and genuinely thanked her. Seeing her as a daughter of God, I felt a measure of respect and concern that had not accompanied previous encounters.

From then on I took my Holy companion with me every time I entered that office.

The next time was interesting. As I approached she discreetly covered her cleavage with her hand. Later, she began wearing more modest outfits. One day, she put photos of her children next to her computer. I commented on them and how sweet they seemed. Then one day she made a very startling statement: "You probably don't remember, but you used to be my Home Teacher when I was a little girl." I did remember, though I certainly hadn't made the connection. As we remembered those days, her eyes misted up and I sensed that while she had become a different person on the outside, inside she was still a sweet, hopeful person of value. How thankful I am to be spending my days viewing life from the perspective of Heaven rather than that of the flesh.

Heavenly Father knows how real our lives are. He is not naïve about our "natural" tendencies. He desires that we approach Him with honesty and candor. How can He help us with our problems if we refuse to discuss them with Him? It is so important that we express our fears and frustrations. Identifying them before God puts them in a new perspective as He shines the light of truth into our darkness. Having done so, the spontaneous outflow is gratitude as we acknowledge His hand in all things.

Chapter 18 – Section 121

Chapter 19 – Inviting God to Put Forth His Finger

The "what" of revelation is common and critical. Every day before I go forth to serve, I ask the Lord what He would have me do. He normally helps me with that. While He also helps me with the "how to do it" part as well, that part seems to be more left up to me. Often, I am left, like Nephi, to go forward in companionship with the Holy Ghost, "not knowing beforehand the things which I should do."^[25] Nephi knew the "what." He was supposed to obtain the Brass Plates of Laban. The "how" was left more to his own inventive initiative. I believe this is to help us to learn and grow.

The same principle applied to The Brother of Jared. His "what" was to build barges and cross the sea. When he sought to obtain light for the barges the Lord asked Mahonri Moriancumer what he would have Him do. He wanted His servant to use and develop his own imagination. Mahonri then went and molten out of rock sixteen small stones with the intent that they would provide light during the long

passage across the sea.

I am quite certain that in preparing those stones to be presented before the Lord, this great prophet put forth his very best effort. Still, despite all his exertions the stones did not shine forth with any light. How often do our best efforts fall short as well? How often do we, with the best of intentions and earnest effort come up short of our objectives?

So, the Book of Ether tells us that The Brother of Jared took those sixteen stones to the Lord and then, acknowledging his own weakness as well as the infinite might and power of God, requested that He put forth his finger and touch them that they might shine.

When we go to speak in Sacrament Meeting, or give a Family Home Evening lesson, or prepare a Home Teaching message, do we do our best to prepare the thing which we intend? Then falling short, in our mortal weakness, do we present our best efforts before the Lord and request that He put forth his finger and touch them that they might shine forth in the brilliance of truth and testimony? We can. We are afforded every privilege given to the Jaredite prophet. We can take our efforts to the Lord and be assured that He will lend His grace and assistance to make our efforts shine.

Consider applying this principle to parenthood, marriage, church service, efforts in your employment, indeed every endeavor in life.

Perhaps most important in understanding the story of the sixteen small stones is the fact that The Brother of Jared began with the intention of needing and receiving the Lord's help. He did not create those stones thinking he might somehow get lucky and shape stones that would shine of their own accord. He knew from the beginning of the project that he would require the added power and influence of

God. His approach to the Lord was not one of, "Well, that didn't work, guess I'll have to beg the Lord to rescue this mess." Rather it was one that intended to have God's power infused into it from the very beginning.

I must also be the same with us. From the very beginning of our marriage we would do well to understand that without the touch of God, it will not shine as it might. The same goes for the lessons we teach, the service we render, the projects and assignments we undertake, the meals we prepare...

Such was not the attitude of the tower builders of Babel, but it was so of the barge builders called the Jaredites.

Chapter 20 – Walking on Water

Chapter 21 – Being of Service

Chapter 22 – Putting God First

Chapter 23 – The Testimony of Jesus

Chapter 24 – Love

Chapter 25 – Example

Chapter 26 – Expectations not Conditions

Chapter 27 – Judging

Chapter 28 - Competition and Comparison

Chapter 29 – Christ is the Author of Change

Epilogue – One Last Visit with the Jaredites

[1] Dad, on the first occasion we played catch. Stated in disgust, after I, intending to toss the ball to him, instead, accidentally broke the front window of our house. We never played catch again until I was a freshman in college. That event didn't go much better, though nothing was damaged, but my ego.

[2] 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

[3] 3 Nephi 9:13

[4] 2 Nephi 2:27

[5] Orson F. Whitney, Conference Report, Apr. 1929, 110

[6] The Best of Dr. John L. Lund, by John L. Lund, Talk on CD, Deseret Book Company

[7] Mosiah 3:19

[8] Ether 2:14

[9] Elder Ezra Taft Benson, *Think on Christ*, BYU Speeches, 1 Oct 1983

[10] Elder Thomas S. Monson

[11] Jacob 4:10

[12] Helaman 58:10-13

[13] Hymns, 152

[14] 1 Nephi 3:7

[15] Jacob 7

[16] Alma 30

[17] Judges 6

[18] Alma 58

[19] 2 Nephi 9:38

[20] Ezra Taft Benson, Speeches, Brigham Young University, 10 December 1974

[21] Moses 1:39

[22] Ether 12:8

[23] Rachel Naomi Remen, *My Grandfather's Blessings*, The Real Story, page 370

[24] *MIG Pilot* by John Barron

[25] 1 Nephi 4:6