

CFM Doctrine and Covenants 3–5 My Work Shall Go Forth

From the Blog

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A Marvelous Work and A Wonder: Insights From Doctrine and Covenants 3–5

This week’s *Come, Follow Me* study of *Doctrine and Covenants 3–5* offers profound insights into the early days of the Restoration and Joseph Smith’s divine calling. These chapters reveal the challenges faced by the Prophet, including the loss of the 116 manuscript pages, and the lessons learned about trusting in the Lord’s guidance. They also highlight God’s unshakable purposes, the principles of repentance, and the call to participate in

His work. Here, we’ll explore key themes, doctrinal insights, and personal applications from these revelations, framed within the historical context of Joseph Smith’s experiences and the eternal truths they teach.

God’s Work Cannot Be Frustrated

One of the most reassuring truths in *Doctrine and Covenants 3* is that God’s purposes cannot be frustrated. The Lord declared, “The works, and the designs, and the purposes of God cannot be frustrated, neither can they come to naught” (*Doctrine and Covenants 3:1*). At a time when Joseph Smith faced what seemed like a devastating setback—the loss of the 116 manuscript pages—this truth served as a reminder that God’s plans transcend human error and opposition.

Joseph's anguish over the lost manuscript illustrates the weight of divine responsibility. Yet, even in this moment of despair, God's assurance pointed to His omniscience and omnipotence. Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught, "Man's successes and failures were known from the beginning by the Lord and were taken into account by Him in the unfolding of His plan of salvation" (Ensign, May 1983).

Personal Application: Reflecting on this principle invites us to trust in God's sovereignty, even when our own plans falter. When we face personal setbacks, remembering that God's purposes remain intact can provide peace and encouragement.

Trusting God over Man

A central theme of *Doctrine and Covenants* 3 is the admonition to fear God rather than man. Joseph's decision to allow Martin Harris to take the manuscript—despite initial counsel from the Lord—was influenced by Martin's persistence and the pressure to satisfy his doubts. The Lord's rebuke was clear: "You should not have feared man more than God" (*Doctrine and Covenants* 3:7).

This principle resonates deeply today as we navigate societal pressures, conflicting values, and the desire for validation. Elder D. Todd Christofferson noted, "We should so love and reverence [God] that we fear doing anything wrong in His sight, whatever may be the opinions of or pressure from others" (BYU Fireside, Nov. 2004).

Personal Application: In our lives, we may face moments where choosing God's will over societal expectations requires courage and faith. Seeking God's approval over human praise leads to spiritual growth and alignment with His will.

The Power of Repentance

Joseph Smith's response to the loss of the manuscript exemplifies sincere repentance. He poured out his soul to God, recognizing his mistake and seeking forgiveness. The Lord's response underscores His mercy: "Remember, God is merciful; therefore, repent of that which thou hast done ... and thou art still chosen" (*Doctrine and Covenants* 3:10).

This pattern of repentance and restoration is central to God's plan. Elder Lynn G. Robbins observed, "Though Joseph was truly remorseful, the Lord still withdrew his privileges for a short season because 'whom I love I also chasten'" (Ensign, Nov. 2016).

Personal Application: This passage reminds us that repentance is not merely about acknowledging mistakes but about turning to God with humility and a desire to change. As we do, His mercy and love enable us to move forward with renewed purpose.

The Marvelous Work of God

Doctrine and Covenants 4 introduces a revelation given to Joseph Smith Sr., highlighting the qualifications and attributes required to participate in God’s work. “A marvelous work is about to come forth among the children of men,” the Lord declared (*Doctrine and Covenants* 4:1). This “marvelous work”—the Restoration of the gospel—would unfold through faith, diligence, and the development of Christlike attributes.

Joseph Smith Sr.’s role in the Restoration was significant, and this revelation provided guidance not only for him but for all who seek to serve in God’s kingdom. The attributes listed in verses 5–6—faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, godliness, charity, humility, and diligence—remain essential for discipleship.

Personal Application: This passage invites introspection. How can we cultivate these attributes in our own lives? As we strive to serve God with all our “heart, might, mind, and strength” (*Doctrine and Covenants* 4:2), we align ourselves with His purposes and experience personal transformation.

Witnesses of the Book of Mormon

Doctrine and Covenants 5 introduces the promise of witnesses to the Book of Mormon plates. Martin Harris’s desire for a tangible witness reflects the human tendency to seek physical evidence for spiritual truths. Yet the Lord emphasized that faith and spiritual confirmation come through His word, not through signs alone: “Blessed are they who believe and have not seen” (*Doctrine and Covenants* 5:7).

The three witnesses—Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, and David Whitmer—were chosen to see the plates and testify of their reality. Their testimony, recorded in the Book of Mormon, stands as a witness to the world. However, the Lord’s invitation to all is clear: “Them will I visit with the manifestation of my Spirit” (*Doctrine and Covenants* 5:16).

Personal Application: This reminds us that spiritual knowledge comes through seeking, studying, and praying. As we prayerfully study the Book of Mormon, we can receive our own witness of its truthfulness through the Holy Ghost.

Humility and Discipleship

Martin Harris’s journey illustrates the need for humility in discipleship. The Lord’s words to Martin were direct: “Humble thyself . . . and thou shalt be spared” (*Doctrine and Covenants* 5:24). Despite his earlier mistakes, Martin’s willingness to repent and bear witness of the Book of Mormon demonstrated his commitment to the work of the Lord.

Elder Marlin K. Jensen taught, “True humility will inevitably lead us to say to God, ‘Thy will be done.’” (*Ensign*, May 2001). This submission enables us to align our will with God’s and to become instruments in His hands.

Personal Application: Developing humility requires self-reflection and a willingness to trust God’s plan. When we let go of pride and rely on Him, we become better equipped to serve and grow spiritually.

Trusting in God’s Timing

The Lord’s instructions to Joseph Smith to “stop for a season” (*Doctrine and Covenants* 5:30) regarding the translation of the Book of Mormon highlight the importance of trusting in His timing. While Joseph may have been eager to move forward, the arrival of Oliver Cowdery as a divinely appointed scribe in April 1829 demonstrated that God’s timing is perfect.

Personal Application: In moments of waiting, we can find peace by trusting that God’s timing is always for our good. Patience and faith allow us to see His hand in our lives.

Conclusion

The revelations in *Doctrine and Covenants* 3–5 teach timeless principles about trusting God, repenting, and participating in His work. They remind us of His mercy, the importance of humility, and the unshakable nature of His purposes. As we apply these lessons in our lives, we deepen our faith, strengthen our discipleship, and draw closer to the Savior. This week’s study invites us to reflect on our own journeys and recommit to aligning our lives with God’s will, trusting in His promises, and participating in the marvelous work of the Restoration.

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Inductive Study Guide: Doctrine and Covenants 3–5

Scripture Marking

1. Doctrine and Covenants 3:1

- Mark: "The works, and the designs, and the purposes of God cannot be frustrated."
- Margin Note: "God's sovereignty ensures His plans will succeed, even amidst human mistakes."
- Cross-Reference: Isaiah 46:9–10; 1 Nephi 9:6.
- Reflective Question: How can I trust God's purposes during times of personal failure?

2. Doctrine and Covenants 3:7

- Mark: "You should not have feared man more than God."
- Margin Note: "Fearing God means respecting His will over human opinions."
- Cross-Reference: Proverbs 29:25; Acts 5:29.
- Reflective Question: What situations tempt me to prioritize others' approval over God's?

3. Doctrine and Covenants 3:10

- Mark: "Remember, God is merciful; therefore, repent of that which thou hast done."
- Margin Note: "Repentance restores our relationship with God and aligns us with His work."
- Cross-Reference: Alma 26:35; Micah 7:18.
- Reflective Question: How has repentance brought peace and direction into my life?

4. Doctrine and Covenants 4:2

- Mark: "Serve him with all your heart, might, mind, and strength."
- Margin Note: "Full dedication to God's work requires our whole being."
- Cross-Reference: Luke 10:27; Mosiah 2:17.
- Reflective Question: What areas of my life need greater alignment with this call to serve?

5. Doctrine and Covenants 4:6

- Mark: "Faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, godliness, charity, humility, diligence."
- Margin Note: "Christlike attributes qualify us to serve in God's kingdom."
- Cross-Reference: 2 Peter 1:5–7; Moroni 7:45.
- Reflective Question: Which attribute do I feel prompted to focus on developing right now?

6. Doctrine and Covenants 5:7

- Mark: "Blessed are they who believe and have not seen."
- Margin Note: "Faith grows through trust in God's word, not physical evidence."
- Cross-Reference: John 20:29; Ether 12:6.
- Reflective Question: What experiences have strengthened my faith without physical proof?

7. Doctrine and Covenants 5:16

- Mark: "Them will I visit with the manifestation of my Spirit."
- Margin Note: "Spiritual confirmation comes through the Holy Ghost."
- Cross-Reference: Galatians 5:22; 2 Nephi 32:5.
- Reflective Question: How can I seek more opportunities to feel the Spirit's witness?

8. Doctrine and Covenants 5:24

- Mark: "Humble thyself and thou shalt be spared."
- Margin Note: "Humility opens the door to God's blessings and guidance."
- Cross-Reference: Alma 5:27–28; James 4:10.
- Reflective Question: How can I show greater humility in my relationship with God?

Reflective Questions for Study and Journaling

1. God's Sovereignty

- How does knowing that God's purposes cannot be frustrated bring comfort during difficult times?
- What steps can I take to better align my will with God's?

2. Repentance and Mercy

- When have I felt God's mercy in my life after repenting?
- How can I make repentance a daily practice?

3. Faith over Fear

- What influences in my life tempt me to prioritize human approval over God's?
- How can I build greater courage to follow God's will?

4. Christlike Attributes

- Which attributes listed in *Doctrine and Covenants* 4:6 do I feel I need to develop further?
- How can cultivating these attributes help me serve others more effectively?

5. Spiritual Witness

- What practices help me feel the Spirit's confirmation of truth?
- How can I invite the Holy Ghost more consistently into my study and daily life?

6. Discipleship and Humility

- How has humility helped me recognize God's hand in my life?
 - What can I do to humbly accept correction and guidance from the Lord?
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Personal Application

Use this study guide as a tool for deepening your understanding and relationship with God. As you study, mark your scriptures, write your reflections, and pray for insights tailored to your unique circumstances. This inductive approach invites the Spirit to guide your learning and transform your heart, helping you better participate in the marvelous work of the Restoration.