

## Come Follow Me Class Insights (Doctrine and Covenants 23-26)

I'm Taylor.

And I'm Tyler.

This is Book of Mormon Central's Come Follow Me Insights. Today, Doctrine and Covenants sections 23 through 26. So, let's just jump right in. These are really fascinating sections, in fact, the time period they cover are really interesting.

Now before we jump into the historical context, let me put your mind to a thought. Have you ever started a new job, or a new responsibility, and had no idea what you were doing? And if so, did you go talk to other people who had more experience? Perhaps you found a mentor. Maybe you went to the internet and looked for insights from people who have been in a similar job. Or maybe you went to YouTube and watched people who have done something similar. Or even, perhaps there's a company manual or a list of best practices.

So, as we consider these sections today, let's remind ourselves that the early saints in April, May, June and July 1830, they're brand new to the Church. In fact, the Church is also brand new; it had only been restored in April of 1830, and so they didn't have other people to go talk to. They didn't have a handbook of instructions. They didn't have YouTube, or the internet, or a bunch of earthly mentors. Now they did have access, these early saints, to great resources to train them, and that's called revelation. And what we love about these sections here is that we're seeing very real, very human people who have a deep desire to do their very best in the work of God, but had questions about how to do that, questions about, how can I best fulfill my duties to God and fellow men?

And so, some of these sections are in that context revealed to help guide the early saints so that they can serve well in building God's kingdom. And as we look at these, you might ask yourself, what are the principles that these early saints learned, and what can we do today, in our lives, to apply these principles in any situation we might find ourselves? And we might also then say we feel deep gratitude that these revelations have been preserved for us, and we have prophets, and all sorts of instructions and help, and a great apparatus of support in the Church to guide us in our duties both within any responsibilities we might have in the Church, but as well as citizens of the world.

Our invitation to you, as we dig deep into these chapters, is remember that God guides his Church and guides his people, and those who are willing to ask for guidance will receive it.

So, let's jump in now, with that historical context. Section 23 is a compilation of revelations given to five different people, very shortly after the Church had been organized, who come to Joseph saying, okay, now what? So, we get Oliver Cowdery first; then Hyrum Smith, Joseph's brother; then Samuel Smith, Joseph's other brother; then Joseph, Senior, his father; and then Joseph Knight.

Now, let's watch for some themes and variations that flow through these five different revelations that are all compiled into section 23. So first, Oliver. Notice he's told that he's blessed, and he's under no condemnation. By the way, you'll notice that the Lord tells Oliver he's not under condemnation, Hyrum, Samuel, and Joseph, Senior. All four of them are told 'you're not under condemnation'. That's interesting. Even though we don't have all of the detail on all of the back story and all the journal entries, so to speak, it seems that perhaps those four felt like they weren't good enough, felt like maybe they had done too many wrong things, that they were condemned. And I love the fact that the Lord opens the section that's given to each one of them, reminding them that they're not under condemnation.

I guess it comes back to John 3:16 and 17: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son..." And why did he send Jesus? It was to save us. "[He] sent not his Son into the world to condemn [us]..." (John 3:17). And I love that that comes through here: 'thou art not condemned'. And my hunch is, is that many of you who are watching are much more prone to forgive and be kind to people around you than you are to the person staring at you in the mirror. I hope that you could hear the Lord's sweet, still, small voice whispering that you're not condemned if you're continually striving and trying your very best to move forward on the covenant path. You're not condemned.

Now, notice the next thing that Oliver Cowdery is told at the bottom of verse 1: "But beware of pride, lest thou shouldst enter into temptation." We've seen it before, that here's this school teacher – he's way more educated, way more learned than Joseph, and it's got this tendency, if he's not careful, to lead to pride, to thinking he's smarter than God's seer and God's prophet, and feeling like he needs to have more power in this early Church. And he's told to beware of that pride.

It's interesting to note that Oliver Cowdery is going to leave the Church in 1838, so eight years later. And then after a decade of being outside the Church, he's going to come back in. But it's his pride, ultimately in 1838 in Missouri, that causes him to leave and he was warned of that right here.

And so, it's interesting the words that God chooses to use. We're all familiar with this word: a lot of us fear becoming prideful. Let me show you a word that relates, and actually comes from the same root word as "pride" – actually, a couple of words. So, the words "first" and "front" actually all come from the same root word that the word "pride" does. And let's dwell on these for just a moment, that those who are prideful put themselves first; those who are prideful put themselves out in front. Now, consider this: in God's Church, who's out front? It's Jesus. And anybody who gets out in front of Jesus, and wants to be first, is going to mislead themselves and possibly others. Only Jesus should be first. Now, God will choose servants to represent him. And that is his Prophet and the Apostles, and in this case, Joseph Smith was called to be the one who's to be out front.

So, Oliver is now given some direction in verse 2: "Make known thy calling unto the church, and also before the world, and thy heart shall be opened to preach the truth from henceforth and forever. Amen." So, Oliver is given this assignment to go and preach the gospel, make it known to the Church, as well as to the world, which leads us, now, to Hyrum in verse 3: "Behold, I speak unto you, Hyrum, a few words; for thou also art under no condemnation," there you go again, "and thy heart is opened, and thy tongue loosed; and thy calling is unto exhortation, and to strengthen the church..."

You'll remember, perhaps, back in section 11 when we covered that entire section given to Hyrum Smith a year before the church was organized, that he was told, "[before you seek] to declare my word, seek to obtain my word..." (Doctrine and Covenants 11:21). Go and study your scriptures, Hyrum. Learn of God's revelations; learn of God's will before you're given this opportunity to go and preach and have your tongue be loosed. Notice what it says: "...thy tongue [is] loosed; ...thy calling is to exhortation, and to strengthen the church continually. Wherefore thy duty is unto the church forever, and this because of thy family. Amen" (Doctrine and Covenants 23:3). So now his tongue is loosed; he's apparently done his studying over the last year. He's learned the things that he needs to out of the scriptures, and he's learned the gospel. So, he's now free to go and teach. He's going to be a powerful force for helping to move the Church forward as a quiet, sustaining influence beside his younger brother Joseph Smith, Junior. It's interesting how steady and constant Hyrum is throughout the entire history of the Church, leading all the way down to the martyrdom in June of 1844.

He seems to be right beside his brother, and it's ironic that he is so not driven by pride. He doesn't need to be that first person, or out in front. He seems to be perfectly okay with his duty being as a support.

Now look at verse 4: "Behold, I speak a few words unto you, Samuel; for thou also art under no condemnation, and thy calling is to exhortation, and to strengthen the church; and thou art not as yet called to preach before the world. Amen." It's interesting here, because he's told to strengthen the Church, but don't go out to the world yet. And the irony here is, Samuel, very soon, is going to be called to now go out into the world and preach the gospel. He is credited as being our first missionary in the whole dispensation. He's the one who- the prophet's brother who goes out and preaches the gospel openly to people.

Now, Joseph, Senior, verse 5: "Behold, I speak a few words unto you, Joseph; for thou also art under no condemnation, and thy calling also is to exhortation, and to strengthen the church; and this is thy duty from henceforth and forever. Amen." So, he's called to strengthen and exhort the Church. He is going to be our first patriarch. Now, we don't have that office of the priesthood revealed at this point. Like Taylor was saying at the beginning, there's not a handbook that lists out everything that's ever going to happen in the Church. In fact, in the dispensation of the fullness of times, the handbook of instructions is being constantly revised. Why? It's because the Lord is revealing things "line upon line, precept [on] precept..." (2 Nephi 28:30), and he's going

to continue to do that. One of our famous Articles of Faith says, "...we believe that [God] will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining unto the Kingdom of God" (Articles of Faith 1:9). So, even though they didn't have the office or the knowledge right here, he was given the foundation to work on preaching, and expounding, and exhorting, and strengthening the Church, because down the road, he is going to get the calling to be the first patriarch. And after him, Hyrum Smith is going to be the second patriarch of the church.

Now, on to Joseph Knight in verse 6 and 7. Joseph is such an interesting character in Church history, wonderful on many levels. He was one of Joseph's earliest, what you would call friends, so when Joseph went to Colesville originally, four years before the Church was established, to pick up some work digging a well, and he was hired as also to help in treasure hunting. And he talks about that in his history with Josiah Stowell and others there in Colesville. Joseph Knight is the one who's involved with that. And he trusts Joseph. He likes Joseph, and he's happy to be a sustaining, supporting character. He doesn't want to be out in front either. He's not driven by pride. He is the one who went to Harmony multiple times and gave money for purchase of paper, and for other things, for Joseph and Emma and Oliver. He brought barrels of food and bushels of grain to help sustain them as they were working through the translation process. But the irony is, Joseph Knight still hasn't joined the Church. And he says, I want to wait until I've read the Book of Mormon, and he's hesitant.

Look at verse 6: "Behold, I manifest unto you, Joseph Knight, by these words, that you must take up your cross, in the which you must pray vocally before the world as well as in secret, and in your family, and among your friends, and in all places." Now look at verse 7: "...behold, it is your duty to unite with the true church, and give your language to exhortation continually, that you may receive the reward of the laborer." So, he started to work through this process of reading the Book of Mormon, but then he realizes he needs to obey; he has tension in his soul and he decides, okay, it's time. I need to just get baptized. And so, a few weeks later, he is going to come and get baptized into the church.

Ironically, if you look at verse 6, he's told to "pray vocally", and is told to "pray ... before the world as well as in secret". It's Joseph and Polly Knight's son, Newell, who is asked to pray in one of those early meetings of the Church in Colesville. And Newell said, no, I prefer not to, and I prefer to pray in private. So, he's going to go out into the woods on his own later on, and begin to try to pray, and he's overcome by a dark spirit. And he comes home, and he's not doing well, and he says to the group to call for Joseph. Joseph is going to go over, and take Newell by the hand, and rebuke the devil, cast him out, at which point he does leave. And a whole bunch of people who were there watched this, and Joseph referred to that as the first miracle of this new Church.

Interest in the Church grows significantly at this point. People start to express a lot more interest, both good and bad. Persecution is going to continue to raise like crazy in Colesville and around that region, driven largely by other churches who are losing congregants, who are coming to join

with this new fledgling Church. And so, opposition is going to mount up, to the point where you get this scenario in Colesville where you have a whole group of people who are ready to be baptized. They dam up the little river there, to get water deep enough to now perform baptisms, and a mob is going to come and destroy the dam, and threaten violence if they do anything else to build it back up. They rebuild the dam; they baptize some people. Interestingly, that's where Emma, Joseph's wife, is finally baptized at that point, but she's not confirmed yet, and she won't get confirmed until August of that year. It's quite a delay because of mob action going on.

Joseph Smith is going to be arrested and taken to court for stirring up the neighborhood by preaching the Book of Mormon. And Josiah Stowell and others there in the region, they come to his defense, and Newel Knight offers a beautiful testimony that shames the prosecution, and the judge acquits him. So, we're good. And just as he's getting off of that one, a constable from a neighboring county comes and arrests him, and takes him to that neighboring county, and he's put on trial again, and after deliberation, he's acquitted a second time.

Now he goes back to Harmony, then he comes back to Colesville to try to give the gift of the Holy Ghost to those who had been baptized. More mob action starts to come up, more threatened violence. He and Oliver now flee for their life, and through the night, they are running, and they sleep under a big tree, keeping watch alternately through the night. They finally get home to Harmony when section 24 is given.

So, stop and picture what this might be like. You have this amazing experience. You have this spiritual outpouring. The Church is restored, and so you're going along through life, and then you have this really great, spiritual plateau experience of the establishment of the Church, and the kingdom of God is now on the earth again, and what happens? Opposition mounts up like never before. The darkness is stirred up against them like never before, and then you experience this spiritual opposition that pulls you down. But I love the fact that God's work is going to move forward regardless of what the earth, or regardless of what hell, throws at these early saints and their Prophet.

So, look at chapter 24. "Behold, thou wast called and chosen to write the Book of Mormon, and to my ministry; and I have lifted thee up out of thine afflictions..." (Doctrine and Covenants 24:1). You've noticed that God doesn't say, I have gotten rid of all of your afflictions, or I've prevented you from having hardship. He said, "I have lifted [you] up"; I've basically sustained you (Doctrine and Covenants 24:1). I've supported you. I've held you through these afflictions so that you can survive them.

Brothers and sisters, we know, we live in this world with you. We know that there are incredible winds of opposition, and the human nature, the way we would like to respond is to just give up sometimes, and to stop fighting or surrender. But I love these sections, because what you see with these very real people going through real circumstances and real struggles is, it's not beautiful. They're not perfect. They're getting some things – it's complex for them, but they're moving forward. They're facing the opposition, and they're not facing it alone. I have been with

you, is what he is saying here. "I have lifted thee up out of thine afflictions, and [I] have counseled thee, that thou hast been delivered from all thine enemies, and thou hast been delivered from the powers of Satan and from darkness!" (Doctrine and Covenants 24:1). He's reminding us, all you have to do is turn, and face the opposition, and start moving forward. I will help you overcome. The victory will be a joint victory between us and the Lord as we move forward in faith in him.

Now notice: "Nevertheless, thou art not excusable in thy transgressions; nevertheless, go thy way and sin no more" (Doctrine and Covenants 24:2). Are you noticing that here's Jesus saying to him -- to Joseph and Oliver -- he didn't say you two are perfect, you've done everything exactly the right way. He's saying, you've had some transgressions. You've even had some sin, but again, I'm not condemning you. Go forward and sin no more. I love that. This hope that comes from that sweet reminder that in Christ, "I can do all things..." (Phillipians 4:13). Without him, I'm not going very far.

Now, verses 1 through 2. One thing I love to do, as I'm studying the scriptures, is look closely at verb tense, because there's a lot that can come from understanding past, present and future. In this case, he is pointing Joseph and Oliver to the past. Look at these things that you've, just recently even, come through, and recognize that my hand is there. I have guided you; I've blessed you, and you wouldn't have survived this without my help. So, he points them to the past. And then look at verse 3: "Magnify thine office; and after thou hast sowed thy fields and secured them, go speedily unto the church which is in Colesville, Fayette, and Manchester, and they shall support thee; and I will bless them both spiritually and temporally;". Did you notice that? He's saying, I've done all this for you in the past. Now, there's something for you to do right now. And it is, go and plant your fields, Joseph. You're a farmer, who happens to have been called to be the Prophet of the dispensation of the fullness of times, but you do still have fields that need to be planted. Go and plant them now.

Just imagine Emma Smith, where there is an expectation of duties that her husband is supposed to perform of primarily being the bread-winner, and he's not planting the bread. He's busy planting souls and harvesting souls, which is a great thing, but yet, there's still a need to take care of his family. And in a bit, we're going to get to section 25, but we want you to just pay attention to the context: that Emma's husband has been persecuted, and mobbed, and taken to court three times. He's traveling all over the place, and the fields basically are going untended, and he's not at home as much. And she has a very common question, a very understandable question many of us might ask: what's happening here, and how will I be taken care of? What's my role, and how will God help me to play a role that matters in bringing forth his kingdom?

But again, let's talk about Joseph Smith. He wants to do everything. How many of us feel that way today? You have to do it all. And we love the counsel that God gives here. In fact, I'm not sure any one of us needs to take this personally, but he tells Joseph: "Be patient in afflictions, for thou shalt have many; but endure them, for, lo, I am with thee, even unto the end of thy days"

(Doctrine and Covenants 24:8). And even though God told him, plant your fields, then go take care of ministering, verse 9: "And in temporal labors thou shalt not have strength, for this is not thy calling...". Well, I'm not really sure I'd want to hear that from God. God says to Joseph: "...Attend to thy calling and thou shalt have wherewith to magnify thine office..." (Doctrine and Covenants 24:9). And what we learn is, God is going to provide for Joseph and his family as Joseph and Emma work hard through the support of others that God blesses.

Alright. So then, from 4 to the end of the section, you get the Lord instructing him for future things and future roles. And as Taylor has said, he's also giving him some future, shall we say, warnings, this idea of, you're going to have many afflictions, so be patient. Don't murmur. Don't get angry that you're having opposition, because if you look at your scriptures – look at the Old and the New Testament. Look at the Book of Mormon. How many people do you see in the scriptures who “embark in the service of God”, and who go and do the work, and they face zero opposition, or zero trials and tribulations along the way (Doctrine and Covenants 4:2)? It's pretty hard to find any examples.

Now some would say, what about Enoch? Those first years for Enoch were not pleasant, trying to get going. Or for Melchizedek, or even those who, in the Book of Mormon for 200 years, have Zion. It took them some serious effort to get that Zion, to establish Zion. And so, notice verse 7: he says, "For thou shalt devote all thy service in Zion; and in this thou shalt have strength." Again, as Taylor mentioned, this idea that in the future, Joseph, your call to come down to this earth was not to become rich. It wasn't to become a businessman, or the most successful farmer. Your call is to be the head of the dispensation of the fullness of times, and the Church is going to support you and take care of the temporal labors.

Notice, he then goes on, in verse 10, to refer to Oliver: "[thou shalt] continue in bearing my name before the world, and also to the church. And he shall not suppose that he can say enough in my cause; and lo, I am with him to the end." I love that. When you're in the service of God, you're with him. Or, you can choose to reject him and turn away from that calling because of the opposition, or because something else is more enticing, but then we're no longer walking with him.

Verse 13: "Require not miracles, except I shall command you, except casting out devils, healing the sick, and against poisonous serpents, and against deadly poisons;". Again, in their human-natured perspective, we love the fantastical. We love when somebody does something that can't be explained, or makes a prophecy that comes to pass, and we love these big, miraculous things. And God's saying, don't require these. So, Joseph has already faced people coming to him, saying things like, show me a sign. Or, even Emma's Uncle came, early on in the translation and said, here's some Hebrew text. Use your fancy Urim and Thummim and translate it for me, and then I'll believe you're a prophet. God doesn't use miracles as signs to convince unbelievers who are demanding a miracle first before they'll believe. And he's reminding us of that here.

Okay, now as we turn our attention to Doctrine and Covenants section 25, I thought it might be fitting to have my wife, my beautiful bride Kiplin, come and join as we work our way through this section. This was given to Joseph Smith's wife, Emma, in a time of great need for her. She has a lot of questions about her role, her identity, what the Lord expected of her husband, and her, in this unfolding of the events in this early period right after the Restoration of the church, and the Lord's going to answer a lot of those questions, and then some.

So Kiplin, what stands out to you, beginning in verse 1?

Well, the very first thing I noticed when I was studying this on my own was, verse 1 is—it's amazing, what the Lord does in this verse. Listen carefully to what he says very first: "Hearken unto the voice of the Lord your God..." (Doctrine and Covenants 25:1). So right off the bat, he's establishing who he is. The Lord your God, not just a God, or the God, but it's your God, Emma. And then he says: "...while I speak unto you, Emma Smith, ..." he calls her by name, "...my daughter;", and he puts a relationship between himself and her in there with the words "my daughter" (Doctrine and Covenants 25:1).

So basically, in verse 1, we have the Lord establishing his identity and Emma's. Then he brings it together in the relationship of those two identities. We'll find that in verse 2, actually. He says: "A revelation I give unto you concerning my will; and if thou art faithful and walk in the paths of virtue before me, I will preserve thy life, and thou shalt receive an inheritance in Zion" (Doctrine and Covenants 25:2). So, this is kind of an explanation of what a covenant relationship looks like, and the thing that was interesting to me here were the words "if thou" and "I will".

So, this is Emma's part, this is my part, this is your part: the "if thou", then you fill in the blank with the terms of the covenant, the covenantal agreement. And then the Lord's part is "I will". And there's an interesting – these are the pronouns here, and this is the difference: that in ours, it's kind of an if statement, and with the Lord, it's a will. It's as if there's no question about his end of the agreement being held up. There is no question about his side of the covenant being kept. It's "I will", and we are the only question mark in there.

But the very next part after that, Jesus Christ says to Emma, and to all of us: "Behold, thy sins are forgiven thee..." (Doctrine and Covenants 25:3). That's interesting, because he willingly puts himself in this relationship with us, and he knows that we're the iffy part of this relationship, if you will, that we're going to make mistakes, and there's going to be struggle, and there's going to be mess ups. And he tells Emma here – he tells us here, her specifically: "...thy sins are forgiven...", and then, "...thou art an elect lady, whom I have called" (Doctrine and Covenants 25:3). So, I'm just going to write here, after establishing identity, and after talking about the covenant relationship a little bit, then he goes here, which is so beautiful, because this is only possible because of Jesus Christ's Atonement.

I love that he says in this section, "thy sins are forgiven thee" (Doctrine and Covenants 25:3). Are there any sweeter words, really, than those? I think a lot of times we carry burdens, our own



weaknesses, our own struggles, our repeated failures with us, and those burdens – we look at ourselves in the mirror every day, and we see the weakness. And the words, "thy sins are forgiven thee", sometimes we think oh, those are great words, but they're reserved for the prophets and special people in the scriptures where we see the Lord say that to them (Doctrine and Covenants 25:3). And I feel like these are words that I can seek to hear daily, constantly, as I work through this process of repenting over and over again, to the point where the repentance and forgiveness cycle becomes just part of my life-blood. It becomes part of who I am and how I approach my days and my life. I love that: "thy sins are forgiven thee" (Doctrine and Covenants 25:3). What beautiful and gentle words those are to hear, and they're not reserved just for people that have a section of scripture written to them. Those can be heard by all of us.

So, one of the things I love about this, what you're teaching here is, sometimes in Church settings, or sometimes even in family settings, we get this idea that hey, you messed up. You're a bad person. You failed. And we think, okay, I need to go and repent, and I need to get that forgiveness, this event. But the way you're describing it, this becomes more of this glorious process of discipleship. It's beautiful.

Just like our babies when we're teaching them to walk, you know? Daddy stands over here, and Mommy stands over here, and you put the little baby down, and you send them off to the other side. And there was not a single time that that happened, ever, that I expected that baby to walk perfectly and straight, and no stumbles, no falls, just straight to Dad and hurray, we did it! Good job! That was just not – that was not even part of the plan. The plan was to put this little baby, who had never walked before, on the ground and send them tottering, and stumbling, and falling off, to the other parent, expecting that this child was going to struggle. They were going to wrestle with balance, they were going to experience some falls, and possibly some bumps and bruises. But that was the plan, and I love that about this particular verse. It communicates to me this idea: yeah, there have been sins and weakness with Emma, and Kiplin, and Tyler, and everyone else. And I'm willing to forgive those over and over again, and you are an elect son or daughter of God, and you're called. You're still called; you're still elect. Let's keep working through this process together. I love that.

It's beautiful. It reminds me of verse 3 of one of my favorite hymns: "Jesus, The Very Thought of Thee". That third verse encapsulates this where it says, "O hope of ev'ry contrite heart, O joy of all the meek, To those who fall, how kind thou art! How good to those who seek!" The message of the gospel is not, you have to be perfect, and if you're not perfect, then aim for the terrestrial kingdom. It's just keep coming to Christ, to be perfected in him daily, as the prophet has invited us to do, and as you're talking about here.

I just thought of an experience we had when we were pulling handcarts at one time. I mean, I'm not as strong as Tyler, I'm close to as strong. But being in the front of that handcart, and pulling that heavy thing over rough terrain, I would say I was this part of that equation. But because I was in the traces, I was yoked, if you will, with someone who could handle the pulling without

too much effort. It worked, and I was okay, even though I was stumbling. I wasn't probably pulling my weight most of the time, but I was trying, I was doing a good job trying. And it's like that with the Savior, on a whole different level, where we are in the traces with him. And because of his infinite Atonement, and because of his power, and his grace, and his mercy, and his love, and his capability to heal, and save, and take that which is imperfect and somehow make it okay, all of us are going to be okay if we stay in this covenant relationship, if we stay yoked with him. So yeah, I love that.

So Kiplin, what would you say to the person who listens to this and says, yeah, this is all good for other people, or for those who feel like they're progressing on the covenant path. But perhaps some of you, or loved ones that you have, may not feel like they're moving forward. They may not even know where the covenant path is at this point in their life, and they're seeking for help, or they're seeking for answers, and they don't feel like they're getting them. Or, perhaps they feel like the Church isn't doing exactly what they want it to be doing. What would you say?

Well, there's a lot of struggle and wrestle right now in the world, with a whole variety of things, and there are some hard questions being asked and answers being sought. I love verse 4. I mean, at first you might read it and be like, oh, "murmur not" -- oh it's going to be a rebuke and it's going to -- let's skip over that one and go to the next (Doctrine and Covenants 25:4). But really, this is one of my favorites, because it's simply a gentle reminder from the Savior to Emma, and to me, and to all of us, to trust. "Murmur not because of the things which thou hast not seen, for they are withheld from thee and from the world, which is wisdom in me in a time to come" (Doctrine and Covenants 25:4).

Are there things in our lives that we feel maybe are withheld from us? Are there blessings that maybe have been delayed, or prayers that don't seem to be being answered for us? I think that all of us have experienced maybe some version, or some range, of those kinds of feelings, and the Lord is reminding us to trust him. He says "wisdom in me...", and he says "...in a time to come" (Doctrine and Covenants 25:4). Those two phrases, for me, stick out here, because the "wisdom in me" part is a reminder to me of this: he's reestablishing his identity again to Emma here, and to me, and to all of us (Doctrine and Covenants 25:4). He's saying, you know, I am your God. I'm all-knowing. I know things. I see things. I'm all-seeing. And in that perfect knowledge, he has wisdom that we cannot understand as mortals. We cannot comprehend all things.

And then he talks about timing, "in a time to come" (Doctrine and Covenants 25:4). This is where this comes in again: trust that the Lord will reveal things, he will give things, he will grant blessings. He will do these things in that covenant relationship when it is wisdom in him, when the perfect God, your perfect God, and my perfect God, sees that it is a wise and right time for these things. And so, it really just comes down to this: do we trust him? Can we trust him? And if we have a hard time with that, can we work on trusting him? He loves effort. Our prophet, who I love, says that "the Lord loves effort", and if we can even just try to trust him when these difficult things are in our path.

In verses 5, and 6, and 14 of this section, we get some very beautiful and practical marriage counsel from the Lord. This counsel right here, it's given specifically to Emma for whatever she was struggling with at this time and needing to hear, but this counsel can be applied to men and women, marriages, other significant, eternal relationships that we have in our life.

That's really an important point that you bring up. If you look, in fact, at verse 16: "...verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my voice unto all." I like that, that he didn't say, this is just to all of you who are going to be married, or this is to all of you who are women. It's, "this is my voice unto all. Amen" (Doctrine and Covenants 25:16). So, these are true principles that he's teaching to Emma in her specific situation, but it really is our great privilege to liken all scriptures unto us. And there are some very, very profound principles to help any relationship, specifically in this setting, in marriage relationships, but as you said, helpful for anybody. It's like our Stake President Clint Mortenson has shared. He said, the most important things in life are those which last the longest.

Stop and think about that in the world in which we live, and all of the things in this world of ours that are trying to draw your time, and your attention, and your energy. And some of them are really good, but most of those things don't last, whereas those eternal relationships of family, and those binding ties that we all have opportunities to connect with our families in a variety of ways, those are eternal relationships. And he's giving us kind of a mini-handbook here of how to help each other in those kinds of lasting relationships.

Yeah, and they're surprisingly practical, too. A lot of times, you know, we might come across a scripture, and we have to kind of extract the practical out of it. Here, it's just pretty practical. He talks about, be a comfort for your husband. Be a comfort for your spouse.

Can I write up some of these words?

Yes. Another thing that she is told here is to use consoling words. I think, in a world that almost enjoys harsh sometimes in a communication realm, perhaps on TV, or in social media, or other forums where it might almost be celebrated to kind of be abrasive and harsh in our words with each other, this counsel is good counsel in any relationship, especially in a marriage: to use consoling words, kind, gentle, soothing, balm-of-Gilead kind of words to soothe things that could be flared into anger or frustration if harsh words were used. Great advice.

Yes, exactly. So, how many times in a family relationship do you recognize when somebody's having a rough day? They're not acting, or speaking, or behaving, in ways that they normally will behave; they're struggling. How helpful is it to come up and tell them, you're being bad, you're being less than ideal as a person today, or we beat each other up? I love the idea that we "comfort those that stand in need of comfort" (Mosiah 18:9). And somebody who's having a great day isn't traditionally in need of comfort. It's usually the people who feel less, who they know they're having a hard time for the most part. And I love this advice here, this counsel to go and comfort with consoling words, not condemning words. Not, you're such a bad person, you

should change so that I can be happy, kind of a way. That's a powerful combination, especially when coupled with this idea of meekness.

Yeah, meekness is an interesting concept, especially when you put it in a marriage context, or a relationship context. Sometimes I feel like in our world, there's a lot of comparing, and competing, and competition. And meekness is, in part, the opposite of that, where we don't feel those competitive feelings, we're not jockeying for position in the relationship, and trying to get ahead or come out on top. It's a feeling of meekness and strength. Meekness is being comfortable with who you are and allowing other people to be who they are, not feeling threatened by that. It's a beautiful word. I love that, and I love that Jesus has referred to, I think the ultimate in strength is also the ultimate in meekness. It's beautiful.

Which then leads to verse 6: "And thou shalt go with him at the time of his going". Remember, that was one of Emma's questions leading into this was, what do I do? Joseph is going on all of these mini-missions, so to speak, to help members of the Church up in Colesville, and Fayette, and up in New York, and she's here on this mortgaged farm from her parents, and should I stay here? Should I go with him? What do I do? And the Lord tells her, "...go with him at the time of his going" (Doctrine and Covenants 25:6). Now, that's applicable to Emma. What about us?

I like those words. I love the word "with". Jesus talks about it when he says, "walk with me." But it's the same kind of imagery here, if we want to make an application to ourselves. This is specific for her, but go with your spouse. Walk with them, be with them. Make this journey with them, not apart. Sometimes it can be easy to get caught up in your different things that you're doing, and to, pretty soon, feel like you're walking apart; you're on a journey together, but you are apart. And there's something beautiful about being on a journey together and being with someone, with them in the ways that matter.

I love that, and it's one of those manifestations of the Lord's command to "be one; and if [you're] not one [you're] not mine" (Doctrine and Covenants 38:27). Rather than living totally parallel lives, it's to increasingly figure out ways to be with, to walk with, to mourn with, and comfort with, and to repent with, and to trust with. So, you see verses 5 and 6 as teaching very similar principles as we get again over here in verse 14.

Yes, he talks again about a spirit of meekness, and then this wonderful phrase that I think nails us all to the wall at times: "...beware of pride" (Doctrine and Covenants 25:14). And that just, again, is that opposite of the meekness that he's talking about. I love this last part: "Let thy soul delight in thy husband [or thy wife], and the glory which shall come upon him [or her]" (Doctrine and Covenants 25:14). Again, in a world that is somewhat obsessed with competing and comparing, what beautiful counsel for a relationship where that does not exist. Or, when it does, we take care of it quickly, but where when one person achieves success, or has wonderful things happen, or something exciting in their life, that the other glories in that, and is delighted in that, and vice versa. That is a covenant kind of relationship and way of interacting with each other. And if you think about how Jesus, in his covenantal connection with us, interacts with us, he is delighted

when good things happen. He loves it. He glories in our successes. And as we can take those principles from that relationship and apply them to our marriages, and our other significant, eternal relationships with people, the blessings will be significant, and that is beautiful.

It's interesting, because if you look at that whole concept, we put a lot of emphasis – and rightly so, because the scriptures do and the prophets do through time – the emphasis on “mourn with those that mourn... comfort those that stand in need of comfort” (Mosiah 18:9). We don't usually talk about, rejoice with those that rejoice. Experience joy with those that are happy and having success in their life. I love the fact here that when we rejoice with those that rejoice, as well as mourn with those that mourn, that builds more of that covenantal connection that I think the Lord does with us, like you're describing. He doesn't just weep with us. I think he celebrates with us.

Now, in verse 7 and 8, Emma receives some very specific promises from the Lord. He says, "...thou shalt be ordained under his hand [Joseph's] to expound scriptures, and to exhort the church, according as it shall be given thee by my Spirit" (Doctrine and Covenants 25:7). You'll notice the promises: you're going to receive some callings, a mission of sorts to fill, but you're going to fulfill it “according as it shall be given thee by my Spirit” (Doctrine and Covenants 25:7). I'll guide you in this, Emma.

Now, we know that later on, when we get to Nauvoo, Emma is going to be set apart as the first president of the Relief Society. And she is going to expound and exhort, and she's going to be doing these things before that point as well, but that's where it really becomes official, this really important calling that she's going to get in building up the kingdom of God on the earth, not just with her family relationships, but now trying to take those lessons that she has learned in her family, and to try to bless other women in the Church in the Nauvoo period. And we'll talk about that later when we get to those sections much later in the year.

I love the fact that Emma is promised here that she is going to expound and exhort the scriptures to the Church as given to her by the Spirit. It's that idea that sometimes, there are people in the Church who feel like they aren't the smartest, they don't know the history, they – brothers and sisters, keep in mind, Emma Smith just got baptized a few days before this section is given. By all measures, she is a brand-new convert. They don't have a big handbook of how to do this, and God is simply saying, trust me. I'll guide you with my Spirit, and you have important things to add and contribute to this growing Church that's just been born recently, so to speak.

I think the most powerful application of this is in the home, where a parent or parents have children, and by the help of the Holy Ghost, they have the capacity, they have everything they need to be able to succeed in expounding scriptures, and exhorting their family, and building up the kingdom of God in that little setting.

I believe the most powerful qualification any of us have for standing, and expounding, and exhorting, is Jesus Christ and our testimony of him. When we are in this covenant relationship with him, and we have had experiences with him, whether in small, fledgling ways, or what we

would call powerful ways, we are qualified to share those things with others, share the things we know. We don't have to be experts, as Tyler said.

So now, in verse 9, we reintroduce or revisit this idea of, just trust me. Keep in mind, Emma has some questions leading into the section about her physical well-being. How are we going to pay the bills? Are we going to survive financially? And God tells her, "...thou needest not fear, for thy husband shall support thee in the church..." (Doctrine and Covenants 25:9). And God makes them some promises that, as Joseph fulfills the calling that is given to him, and Emma fulfills her role in all of these things, side by side with him, that the Lord will provide in various ways for all of those concerns that they have financially and temporally.

That's really comforting. It tells me that the Lord is not only concerned with our spiritual welfare, but also, he's very involved in the physical and temporal aspects of our mortal journey. He cares about them, and he helps us with those, too.

It's beautiful, which then leads into verse 10: "...verily I say unto thee that thou shalt lay aside the things of this world, and seek for the things of a better." It's that idea of, once again, the most important things in life are those that are the most eternal, that last the longest. And here's the Lord, inviting her to put her focus and her attention not on the things of the world, but on the things of a better world than this.

I had a little thought about the phrase "...thou needest not fear..." (Doctrine and Covenants 25:9). Sometimes in – from my own experience, there's my heart, okay? And, forgive my drawing here, but here's a shovel. When there are things that I need to root out of my life, dig them up, so to speak, so here we go, here., Aright? And here it is, all piled up on the side here. Oftentimes, if I just try to take the bad out, and I leave a void there, oftentimes this stuff will come spilling back in, or other things. We have an adversary out there who loves to fill those voids with things. But if I am conscientious about saying, okay, I'm trying to take this out -- and of course when I say I, I don't really mean I, I mean Jesus Christ – we. When we take this out, for me, I'm going to write fear here, okay? The opposite of fear – and I think most of us have experienced that in one realm or another, in one genre of issues or another – the fear, this is the filler for that hole. And I've found that this works every time to fill that void, and to keep other bad things out. And so, when I replace the fear with – you can call it faith as well – with trust in Jesus Christ, trust in God, this become fertile soil, the trust. The fear is gone, and the trust is there, and now things can grow, and things can take root.

Okay. So, let's shift gears a little bit into talking about this. It's a very little book, and it was published in 1835. This is a replica copy of the very first hymnbook of our Church. That assignment, or that responsibility, was given to Emma to compile those hymns based on her upbringing as a good member of the Methodist Church and those hymns that she knew and loved, as well as getting additional hymns from other people. And so, five years later, we get our first hymnbook.

So, the question that really begs asking here is, why music? Why do we need that as part of the coming forth of the gospel of Jesus Christ and building up of the Church of Jesus Christ in the latter days? What is the role of music? You'll notice the way the Lord answers that question in verse 12 by saying, "For my soul delighteth in the song of the heart; yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads." It's interesting to look at our life, raising our family, and the role that music plays, and how it creates almost a conduit between heaven and earth for the Spirit to come and touch lives and open hearts in ways that words alone can't do. It's a very powerful means whereby we can connect with God and with heaven.

When I first arrived in Brazil on my mission, I was blessed with one of the world's greatest missionary trainers. His name was Elder Pratt, Brian Pratt. He was a zone leader, and we were living in this suburb of the capital city of Parana in Brazil, in Curitiba. We were out in Taramã and Bairro Alto, and about two days, three days into the mission we needed to go up to the chapel at the very top of the area. And because he was a zone leader, he needed to get the numbers reported from the other missionaries in our zone. And he told me I could go into the chapel and either study or play the piano.

I was having a very hard time. Those first two or three days of my mission were very, very hard for me, as far as trying to get used to this mission life, and the food, and the living conditions; it was very hard. I went in to that piano and I started playing hymns. I started singing them to the best of my ability in Portuguese, as well as mixing in some English. I poured my heart out to the Lord in ways that I had tried before in the previous two to three days on my knees, or lying down in bed, or sitting at the table, or studying at my desk. I had tried to pour my heart out, but it wasn't – I wasn't feeling as connected as I knew that I needed to. It was in that moment, when I'm sitting there at the piano for thirty or forty minutes, pleading with God through music, that I felt that those prayers were being answered. And I knew that I wasn't alone. I knew that I was going to be able to make it through that mission. I knew it was going to be hard, but I knew I wasn't alone. These hymns became heartfelt prayers for little Elder Griffin, and I needed those desperately. And it created this firm foundation for the rest of my mission to move forward, trusting that God wasn't going to forsake me, he was with me.

Thank you. I love that story. It made me think for a minute about our little Felicia on her mission, and some of the sweet experiences she has had with the Lord helping to sustain her through those times of difficulty.

Something that I noticed about the wording in this on my last time through this section was the Lord says, "...my soul delighteth in the song of the heart" (Doctrine and Covenants 25:12). And I thought it was interesting, it just struck me this time that he didn't say the song of the voice, or the song of the violin, or the song of the piano. It was the song of the heart. And it made me think a little bit more broadly about what maybe this could mean. We all, at times, have those feelings in our heart, those yearnings, those longings, those reachings. I believe those feelings,

those songs of our heart, so to speak, ascend up to heaven, and God hears those. I love the little phrase in relation to this from the song, “in the quiet heart is hidden sorrow that the eye can't see”, and also the phrase from another hymn: “and Jesus, listening can hear the songs we cannot sing.” These songs and feelings of our heart, I believe, could be part of this, and God delights in those things as they reach out to him and he reaches back.

I love it, which then ties in, notice the very first word of verse 13: “wherefore”. It sets up this causal relationship between what came before and now what comes after the word wherefore. Because of everything that we've read here in verse 12, the outcome, the conclusion that the Lord is making for us is to “lift up thy heart and rejoice, and cleave unto the covenants which thou hast made” (Doctrine and Covenants 25:13). I love that how he is making this connection between “...the song of the righteous [being] a prayer unto me” and “[lifting] up [our] heart and [rejoicing]...” and holding on tightly to those covenants which we've made with him (Doctrine and Covenants 25:12-13).

I loved the connection with covenants and rejoicing in here, knowing a little bit about what Emma's going to go through, what she has been through. You know, life is not going to be easy for these early Saints, and life is not always easy for us, but the message here from the Lord is “lift up [your heads] and rejoice...” (Doctrine and Covenants 25:13). This kind of rejoicing doesn't mean we're just happy all the time and everything's always wonderful. This kind of rejoicing is, for me, is more of a foundational undercurrent in our life, and we can be sad. We can be really sad sometimes, and yet that foundation of just supportive, uplifting, enduring joy is there because of Jesus Christ and our covenants with him and the hope that that brings into our times of struggle and trial. So, I love the connection between the rejoicing and the covenants, and hold onto those.

So now, as we skip down to verse 15, he says, "Keep my commandments continually, and a crown of righteousness thou shalt receive." I love that idea of back to the covenants again. “If [you] love me, keep my commandments” comes through here, and if you do, I will give you a “crown of righteousness” (John 14:15, Doctrine and Covenants 25:15). The promise is very sure here. You will receive that crown of righteousness in the eternities that won't fade like so many of the things on this earth do.

As we wrap up this section, let's end where we began and talk a little bit more about identity, because I think it's important. It seems as if every generation throughout the history of time has been given challenges to wrestle with, and sometimes multiple challenges. And one of our challenges currently today, I believe, is this question of identity, and it can have many forms and varied applications. You or people you know may be struggling with their identity in relation to their race, or in relation to LGBTQ issues, or in relation to, what does it mean to be a daughter of God, or what does it mean to be a son of God, or in relation to mental health issues, or a myriad of other ways that these identity questions can be raised today. The identity questions that people have can be profound and soul-wrenching at times. Let us not be afraid of the wrestle. God



allows us to wrestle, and it's a noble wrestle. And I believe that as we do wrestle before the Lord with these things, that answers will come, truth will come, light will come and whatever your particular wrestle, stay with Jesus. Stick with Jesus Christ; trust Jesus. The world will offer all kinds of solutions, and those solutions will not fill the gaps and the empty places and the longings of your heart. They might make an attempt at it, but it will not be sufficient to give you what you need. Only Jesus can give you that.

Have there been wrongs in the world? Yes. Have there been misunderstandings, and misconceptions, and misapplications? Yes. Has there been evil and darkness? Yes. Have there been harms and hurts? Yes. Are there holes and imperfections in our understandings and our applications? Yes. But part of the glory of the Restoration is knowing that Jesus Christ can and will restore. He will restore that which has been lost. He will right that which has been wrong. He will fix that which is broken. He will heal that which is hurt. Jesus Christ will restore light, and truth, and love, and beauty to the world. That, to me, is one of the most glorious parts of the Restoration. And if we will trust him and keep our covenants with him, I know that those things will come to pass.

Thank you. Now as we come to the close of this particular episode, I just wanted to say, if any of you have ever wondered why I'm usually pretty happy and pretty upbeat, it's because I have the Lord in my life, and I have an angel in my life, Kiplin, and what a privilege it is to be able to share this particular section with you, standing side-by-side with her, as we walk this path together forward.

Brothers and sisters, know that God lives. Jesus is the Christ and there is “no other way nor means whereby” any of us can find enduring joy (Helaman 5:9). It's only in and through him.

May God bless you to feel his power in your life.

Know that you're loved.

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