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Toward Emotional Maturity: Insights from the Book of Mormon

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The dreaded D’s—discouragement, despair, and depression—seem to be on the rise. It is common for teachers to have youth grappling with feelings of loneliness, discouragement, anger, depression, and even suicidal thoughts and tendencies. These negative emotions are often accompanied by fear and self-doubt, enemies of the faith in Christ so essential to progress and happiness in mortality.

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The Book of Mormon contains much of worth to strengthen and assist us in our quest to rise above the discouraging circumstances of our times. Nephi speaks repeatedly of being “exceedingly sorrowful” (1 Nephi 3:14; 17:19). The sons of Mosiah reflected on a time at the beginning of their mission to the Lamanites when their “hearts were depressed” and they nearly returned

home (Alma 26:27). The two thousand stripling warriors experienced being “depressed in body as well as in spirit” while engaged in defending their freedoms (Alma 56:16). Alma was “weighed down with sorrow” and experienced “anguish of soul” (Alma 8:14). Nephi writes of having his “heart . . . swollen with sorrow” and experiencing “agony of soul” (Helaman 7:6). Mormon speaks of experiencing sorrow all of his days because of the wickedness of his people (see Mormon 2:19).

Importance of Emotions

Furthermore, while counseling his son Shiblon, Alma wrote the following insightful advice: “See that ye bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled with love” (Alma 38:12). Passions are strong emotions that, according to Alma, need to be disciplined or controlled, much as a bridle can channel the energy and strength of a young horse to productive purposes. Emotions play a vital role in determining our level of happiness in life. Without them, life would be sterile and bland. However, unbridled feelings seldom result in a more productive life.

Emotion is frequently defined as an affective or psychological state of consciousness that often arises spontaneously rather than through conscious effort. More simply, emotions are the feelings we have. Strong feelings impact us mentally and physiologically—for good or for ill.

Feelings or emotions can be roughly dichotomized as positive or negative. Positive emotions include happiness, love, peace of mind, contentment, empathy, patience, hope, and joy. Negative emotions include resentment, bitterness, anger, fear, rage, discouragement, jealousy, worry, self-pity, and irritability. Positive emotions give zest to our lives; they make life meaningful. They are necessary for happiness and well-being. Negative emotions, despite the fact that we try to avoid them, are also necessary for the mortal experience as there must be opposition in all things (see 2 Nephi 2:11). Periods of low moods are normal and a part of the testing experience inherent in mortal life. A “dark night of the soul” can be therapeutic in the long run if we are able to turn our hearts to God. During a time of great difficulty in my life, I came upon the following lines written by William Blake. Memorizing these words helped me better understand Lehi’s injunction about the need for opposition, enabling me to keep my negative emotions in check.

Joy & Woe are woven fine.
A Clothing for the Soul divine.
Under every grief & pine,
Runs a joy with silken twine.

Blake also writes:

It is right it should be so.
Man was made for Joy and Woe.
And when this we rightly know
Thro the World we safely go.¹

Inasmuch as both positive and negative emotions are part of mortality, one of life's challenges is to minimize the impact of negative moods and emotions by learning from them. Otherwise, negative emotions will come to dominate our waking hours, preventing us from experiencing the joy intended for mortality.

Emotions and Agency

Alma's counsel to Shiblon teaches that passions and emotions are within our realm of accountability. There can be a moral component of our emotions just as there can be a moral component of our thoughts and actions. A particular emotion, such as anger, might be moral or immoral depending on whether it manifests itself productively or unproductively. Unfortunately, some popular psychology teaches that we are responsible for our *actions*, and possibly even our *thoughts*, but *feelings* are beyond our control; we simply are incapable of choosing our emotional state. Such notions are contradicted by the teachings of prophets, ancient and modern.²

Initially, we may have negative emotions wash over us unbidden, but we have the power to channel those emotions productively, and possibly even to dispel them by replacing them with a divine counterpart. Satan's mission is to destroy our agency through the captivity of our wills. He never comes closer to touching the core of our being than when he captures our hearts, our feelings, and our thoughts. Just as sinful behaviors can become habitual, some emotions such as resentment, bitterness, and hopelessness can also play into the purposes of the adversary.

Negative Emotions, Latter-day Bondage

The sons of Mosiah became discouraged and distressed about the obstacles facing them as they began their mission among the Lamanites. “Now when our hearts were depressed, and we were about to turn back, behold, the Lord comforted us, and said: Go amongst thy brethren, the Lamanites, and bear with patience thine afflictions, and I will give unto you success” (Alma 26:27, see also Alma 17:10). Apparently depression is not exclusively a latter-day challenge.

Clinical depression has a physiological basis in brain chemistry that can result in sadness, aimlessness, lack of physical strength, or even self-destructive feelings, and successful treatment usually requires professional help and possibly medication.³ Clinical depression is usually not a moral issue and has more in common with having poor eyesight or a bad back than a bad attitude. It is not something we choose to experience. Depression is a misfortune but not a fault. We also commonly use the term *depression* to refer to situations or states of mind most of us experience from time to time such as when we feel discouraged, have the blues or the blahs, or are “down in the dumps” about circumstances or events in our lives. The sons of Mosiah were not likely suffering from clinical depression; rather, they were experiencing the normal discouraging circumstances that come with mortal life. This type of depression, like clinical depression, also involves negative emotions and feelings. It is sometimes difficult to determine which aspects of our feelings and behavior remain within our own control. If we are not vigilant, the discouragement that comes from issues over which we have no control can lead to negative behaviors and attitudes over which we *do* have control—another reason for seeking professional medical help when facing prolonged depression.

A noted therapist wisely wrote, “The thing that characterizes those who struggle emotionally is that they have lost, or believe they have lost, their ability to choose those behaviors that make them happy.”⁴ Unhappiness is exacerbated by choosing to focus on negative emotions. By learning to recognize our emotional state and utilize the great gift of moral agency, we can escape the worst consequences of unhealthy negative emotions. Of course, our best efforts will be in vain without the light and strength available through the gift of the Holy Ghost and the merciful enabling power of our Lord’s Atonement.

Insights from the Book of Mormon

One of the great themes of the Book of Mormon is bondage and deliverance. The word *bondage* appears 88 times, and the word *deliver* (or one of its derivatives) is used 236 times in this remarkable record. I have selected several examples of how different characters in the book dealt with intense emotions. Viewing some negative emotions as a form of bondage, we can observe how various individuals were delivered from the bondage of discouraging feelings and, in the process, find strength for our own lives. Also, the wisdom of Alma's counsel to Shiblon is evident, as in each case it was necessary to "bridle" emotions so that love could prevail.

Lehi and Sariah—a family crisis (see 1 Nephi 5:1–8). In these few verses we gain a glimpse into the negative emotional state of a mother who fears for the loss of her sons. The delay of the four brothers in returning from their journey to Jerusalem to obtain the brass plates has resulted in some negative feelings within Sariah such as fear, worry, and anxiety. Unfortunately, as often happens, she takes out her frustration on the person nearest at hand—her husband, Lehi. Nephi artfully records this poignant scene allowing the reader to sense the deep emotion involved. "[My mother] truly had mourned because of us. For she had supposed that we had perished in the wilderness; and she also had complained against my father, telling him that he was a visionary man; saying: Behold thou hast led us forth from the land of our inheritance, and my sons are no more, and we perish in the wilderness. And *after this manner of language* had my mother complained against my father" (1 Nephi 5:1–3; emphasis added).

Lehi could respond with negative emotions of his own. It would be easy for him to become defensive under the circumstances. Some might feel Sariah deserves a rebuke for her lack of support and her emotional accusations. Instead, Lehi maintains emotional control and reassures Sariah that all will be well with their sons. So certain is Lehi of the Lord's guidance that he speaks of the promised land as an accomplished fact ("I have obtained a land of promise"). Nephi records, "*And after this manner of language* did my father, Lehi, *comfort* my mother, Sariah, concerning us, while we journeyed in the wilderness" (1 Nephi 5:6; emphasis added). I picture Lehi comforting Sariah not only with his words but also with an embrace, allowing her to release her pent-up emotions. Upon the return of her sons, Sariah is comforted and bears her witness of the prophetic role of her husband, saying, "Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath commanded my husband to flee into the

wilderness; yea, and I also know of a surety that the Lord hath protected my sons, and delivered them out of the hands of Laban, and given them power whereby they could accomplish the thing which the Lord hath commanded them. And *after this manner of language* did she speak” (1 Nephi 5:8; emphasis added).

Sariah’s negative emotions directed toward Lehi were understandable but still unproductive. By keeping his own emotions hopeful and positive, Lehi was able to be a source of strength and comfort to his wife. We never again read of Sariah complaining. On the contrary, this experience may have prepared her to play a more significant role in helping the other wives and children bear the trials of their journey.

When we consider the kinds of circumstances that tear marriages and families apart, they almost always result from emotional immaturity. Many conference talks have challenged the Saints to overcome the anger and bitterness that lead to behavior unbecoming of a Latter-day Saint.⁵ Positive emotions, coupled with living in harmony with Church teachings, almost always lead to better resolutions of marriage and family problems.

Nephi’s discouragement and resolution (see 2 Nephi 4:17–35). The next example addresses the issue of how to manage discouragement and feelings of inadequacy. Nephi’s father has died and the responsibility for the extended family has fallen on Nephi’s shoulders. His elder brothers have begun to denounce Nephi viciously and threaten to take his life. We are indebted to Nephi for recording this experience in his journal so that we might learn from his experience. We are witnessing a young prophet in a deep state of depression caused by some very real and very negative circumstances.

Notice the strong language Nephi uses to describe his emotional state: “O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities. . . . When I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins” (2 Nephi 4:17–19). Nephi reminds himself of the many blessings God has given him (2 Nephi 4:20–25) but then asks why, in light of God’s goodness, he feels so terrible. “Why should my heart weep and my soul linger in the valley of sorrow, *and my flesh waste away, and my strength slacken* [a symptom of depression], because of mine afflictions? And why should I yield to sin, because of my flesh? Yea, why should I give way to temptations, that the evil one have place in my heart to destroy my peace and afflict my soul? Why am I angry because of mine enemy?” (2 Nephi 4:26–27; emphasis added).

Nephi views his lack of peace and happiness as a temptation of Satan that results in feelings of anger, depression, and hopelessness. In this remarkably transparent account, Nephi describes the specific crucial behaviors he utilizes to shake off this terrible state and restore peace to his soul. “Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul” (2 Nephi 4:28). These powerful words and those that follow suggest Nephi is making an internal resolve to use his agency to “get a grip on himself” in a sense, and to see his circumstances through God’s eyes. He turns with firm resolve to the Savior, his rock and salvation. We read his prayer of faith and his commitment no longer to trust in the “arm of flesh,” which symbolizes the mortal perspective. It is as though Nephi is saying, “Lord, I will no longer trust in my own limited view of our discouraging family situation; I will put my trust only in thee!”

Nephi’s experience has been highly instructive and helpful as I have faced various discouraging circumstances that left me wallowing in feelings of unworthiness and inadequacy. I encourage students to sincerely ponder and internalize those powerful words, *“Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul.”* As students contemplate these words, faith and power will be restored to their heart. This is powerful spiritual medicine. I feel strengthened by the idea that I need not be a victim of my negative emotions. It requires me to recognize that I have responsibility for my feelings and impels me to use my agency to press forward and improve. Without the understanding gained from Nephi’s journal, it would be easy to rationalize my negative moods and resort to justifying the feelings and behavior that usually flow from them.

Pahoran’s response to Captain Moroni’s anger (see Alma 60–61). During a critical time of the war with the Lamanites, Captain Moroni sends an epistle to Pahoran, the governor of the land. Moroni incorrectly assumes that Pahoran is not fulfilling his responsibilities to the army. He accuses Pahoran of neglect, thoughtlessness, slothfulness, and withholding provisions (see Alma 60:5–9). Moroni blames the losses in battle on Pahoran’s iniquity, going so far as to suggest that he may have become a traitor to his country (see Alma 60:18, 28). Most of Captain Moroni’s assumptions were wrong. Though inspired by patriotic feelings, his strong emotions were negatively shaped by the difficult circumstances he faced. In today’s world such accusations to a superior officer would be worthy of rebuke, dismissal, or even court-martial.

Pahoran's reply is a remarkable example of emotional restraint. By choosing not to take offense, he was able to communicate clearly and work toward resolving the problem. In his letter, Pahoran sympathizes with the plight Moroni and the Nephite armies are experiencing. After explaining that a rebellion has occurred in Zarahemla, driving the rightful government out of the land, Pahoran reestablishes a rightful and kind relationship with Moroni with these mature words: "And now, in your epistle you have censured me, but it mattereth not; I am not angry, but do rejoice in the greatness of your heart" (Alma 61:9).

Consider how this kind of reaction could calm a potentially explosive situation in a family or work environment: (1) "*It mattereth not*"—whenever possible, we can set aside the mistakes of others and move forward. (2) "*I am not angry*"—maintaining a mature emotional state of being and refusing to take offense⁶ are essential to resolving differences. (3) "*I . . . rejoice in the greatness of your heart*"—we can express our love by giving others the benefit of the doubt and attributing noble and righteous motives to their words and actions. How sweet it is to have someone dismiss our follies, refuse to get angry, and acknowledge that our motives were pure. Pahoran was clearly in full control of his emotions and prevented a division between him and his capable military leader.

Mormon counsels his son amid discouraging circumstances (see Moroni 9:4–6, 25). The Book of Mormon preserves a poignant letter of joy and woe from a father to his son sometime during the final battles of the Nephite nation. It contains a valuable lesson about managing the negative emotion of hopelessness, which often leads people to simply quit trying. Mormon recounts his efforts to get his people to repent, but everything he has tried has been in vain. "When I speak the word of God with sharpness they tremble and anger against me; and when I use no sharpness they harden their hearts against it; wherefore, I fear lest the Spirit of the Lord hath ceased striving with them" (Moroni 9:4).

However, Mormon uses this seemingly hopeless situation to remind his son that they must continue to labor diligently in their callings to teach, warn, and testify, regardless of the response of the people, "for if we should cease to labor, we should be brought under condemnation; for we have a labor to perform whilst in this tabernacle of clay, that we may conquer the enemy of all righteousness, and rest our souls in the kingdom of God" (Moroni 9:6).

Moroni's persistence reminds me of a parable by Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor, who told about "a just man who comes to Sodom hoping to save the city. He pickets. What else can he do? He goes from street to street, from marketplace to marketplace, shouting 'Men and women, repent. What you are doing is wrong. It will kill you; it will destroy you.' They laugh, but he goes on shouting, until one day a child stops him. 'Poor stranger, don't you see it's useless?' 'Yes,' the just man replies. 'Then why do you go on?' the child asks. 'In the beginning,' he says, 'I was convinced that I would change them. *Now I go on shouting because I don't want them to change me.*"⁷

The message is clear. If we allow negative and discouraging feelings to overwhelm us when others reject our efforts to help them, we only jeopardize our own spiritual well-being. Parents are sometimes discouraged about continuing to have family home evening or scripture study because it doesn't seem to be strengthening the family. In fact, children sometimes rebel with such intensity that parents conclude it is doing more harm than good and just give up. Missionaries sometimes wonder why they should bother to study or to tract every day when no one seems to be the least bit interested. If we use lack of success with others as a reason to cease or diminish our own efforts, then we ourselves may lose the Spirit and jeopardize our own exaltation.

From the stories just recounted we learn valuable lessons of life. From Lehi we learn of the importance of self-control and Christlike love and compassion. From Nephi we grasp the value of shaking off our own mortal perspective of difficult circumstances and turning to God. We sense the practical wisdom of always thinking the best of others as Pahoran did. And from Mormon we learn to never give up in righteous efforts.

Sometimes our help and strength during depressing times comes directly from God as it did for Nephi, and other times the help and perspective comes from others who are at a higher level of managing their emotions (Sariah was strengthened by patient Lehi; Captain Moroni was blessed by steadfast Pahoran). In every instance, favorable outcomes were made possible by the power that flowed through self-mastery combined with divine grace or enabling power.

Emotional Maturity—a Christlike Quality

Emotional maturity is the ability to increasingly rise above our negative or destructive moods and emotions. The greatest use of our personal agency may be to determine what sort of inner world we create for ourselves each day.

Emotions can be very powerful and have a significant, possibly even a central, influence in shaping our thinking and behavior. The emotions can also positively or negatively affect our spirituality and our ability to receive and properly understand personal revelation.

Our feelings are one of the means through which God often communicates with his children. President Boyd K. Packer taught, “In your emotions, the spirit and the body come closest to being one.”⁸ He further explained that “the spiritual part of us and the emotional part of us are so closely linked that it is possible to mistake an emotional impulse for something spiritual.”⁹ As we mature spiritually, we can learn to distinguish between true spiritual feelings and the emotional feelings that we sometimes confuse with the spirit. Our commitment must rise above the pull of negative feelings and moods. That is the purpose of our covenants—to help us do the right thing regardless of the state of our feelings. In *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis records these words from the fictional devil to his nephew, “Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy’s will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and *still obeys*.”¹⁰ Sometimes, as Lewis writes in *Mere Christianity*, we simply have to tell our moods “where they get off.”¹¹

Inasmuch as one of the central purposes of our mortal experience is to learn to recognize and respond appropriately to the influences of the Holy Ghost, it is of critical importance that we learn to discern between healthy and unhealthy emotions. If the Holy Ghost works frequently through our feelings, it is essential that we guard against the deception and confusion that flow from misinterpreting our feelings.

I am convinced that emotional immaturity is among the most common reasons we stumble in establishing close relationships—with God, with ourselves, and with others. Among the most valuable characteristics of spiritual maturity we can possess is the ability to dispel unhealthy negative emotions. I find it helpful to suggest to my students three levels of emotional growth. The “way of the child” (or telestial level of emotional maturity) is to give full vent to our emotions—positive or negative. The “way of the honorable man of the earth” (terrestrial level) is to control our emotions in a socially acceptable manner. Surely this is a step up, but there is a more excellent way. The “way of the sincere disciple of Christ” (celestial level) is to strive to eventually eliminate or dispel (not stifle) negative emotions and replace them with a divine counterpart.¹²

Additional Insights from the Book of Mormon

The Book of Mormon contains numerous other passages to strengthen us emotionally. Overcoming the pull of negative emotions will require great effort on our part. Just as lust or selfishness, or indeed any temptation or trial, must be battled mightily with the protection of the full armor of God, so also negative emotions and discouragement must be recognized and battled. We will be held accountable for discouragement or bitterness if we do nothing, especially when God has given us resources to recognize, fight, and eventually conquer them, although it may be a lifelong battle. Remember Mormon's counsel: "Let us labor diligently; for if we should cease to labor, we should be brought under condemnation; for we have a labor to perform whilst in this tabernacle of clay, that we may conquer the enemy of all righteousness, and rest our souls in the kingdom of God" (Moroni 9:6).

Change our circumstances. Sometimes the only remedy for negative emotions is to alter our environment in some way. When we wake up in the morning with the weight of the world on our shoulders, half-paralyzed with discouragement, even the simplest action may begin an emotional transformation. Get out of bed, take a shower, make the bed, eat some breakfast; then one is more likely to deal rationally and productively with the problems of the day. Other circumstances require more drastic action, such as getting new roommates, finding new friends, changing jobs, etc. The Nephites frequently packed up their tents or abandoned their homes in order to avoid an increasingly unfavorable environment.¹³

Changing our perspective. There are times when we have limited agency in altering negative circumstances. We simply have to endure difficult situations. But we have full agency to choose how we interpret, think about, perceive, and even remember negative events or conditions in our lives. For example, when Alma's people were placed in bondage to Amulon and the wicked priests of King Noah, their trials were hard to bear and they turned to God for strength. He comforted them with these words: "And now it came to pass that the burdens which were laid upon Alma and his brethren were made light; yea, the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord" (Mosiah 24:15). Mormon and Moroni could not change the discouraging circumstances into which they were born, but they continually reframed their experiences by viewing them through an eternal perspective, or the "mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16).

Recall Pahoran *choosing* to interpret Captain Moroni's motive in such a manner as to bring about a positive solution to a most discouraging situation. Emotions generally flow from experiences in life and how we process them. If this is so, the greatest battleground for emotional control is in our minds. Even if we cannot change the circumstances that elicit discouraging emotions, we can call upon inner resources and divine grace to alter the way we look at or remember painful circumstances. How we choose to interpret a painful memory is a matter of agency.

The "Light of Christ test." Mormon's well-known teachings on the Light of Christ (anything that leads us to Christ is good; anything that leads us away from Christ is evil) help us distinguish between good and evil (see Moroni 7:16–19) and also evaluate the impact of our emotions. Is my emotional state drawing me closer to Christ? Are my current feelings inspiring me to be more Christlike in my attitudes and behavior? A negative emotion, although painful or uncomfortable, can nevertheless serve a useful purpose—it signals that something in our lives may not be right. Like the warning lights in our cars, negative emotions call our attention to the need for some kind of an internal tune-up. Anger, resentment, or discouragement are possibly an indication that something is not right with our heart, our thinking, or our perceptions, even though our behavior may be exemplary. I have learned through experience to distrust my judgment during times of emotional discouragement, and I try not to make important decisions while under the influence of a negative mood.

Learning new emotional habits. Bridling our passions can lead us to examine how our own state of being can lead to solutions rather than to blaming others. New ways of resolving problems open up to us when we are no longer blinded by unproductive emotions. The phrase "be of good cheer" appears over a dozen times in scripture, and in nearly every instance the counsel to cheer up comes in the midst of difficult or discouraging situations. For example, Christ's voice came to Nephi as his people faced execution if they did not renounce their belief in the sign of Christ's birth (see 3 Nephi 1:13; Alma 17:31). President Hinckley was an avowed optimist. "It isn't as bad as you sometimes think it is. It all works out. I say that to myself every morning."¹⁴ Pessimism and optimism are learned emotional states. The emotional maturity to learn a new emotional state requires effort.

Deliverance—the Atonement of Christ

When my family was faced with a life-threatening illness, there were occasions when deep sadness overwhelmed us. At that time my wife found Helaman's words very therapeutic. We made a copy of his words for our bedroom, and I carried a small copy in my shirt pocket. "*Therefore we did pour out our souls in prayer to God, that he would strengthen us and deliver us, . . . yea, and also give us strength. . . . 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*" (Alma 58:10–12).

Emphasizing the dual purposes of the Atonement, Elder David A. Bednar distinguished between the "*cleansing and redeeming power* that helps us to overcome sin and a *sanctifying and strengthening power* that helps us to become better than we ever could be relying only upon our own strength."¹⁵ The *redeeming* power of Christ's Atonement not only cleanses us from the burdens of sin, but also helps us bear the sickness and infirmities inherent in mortal life (see Alma 7:11–12). The *enabling* power of the Atonement helps us to gradually change our human nature and "be partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4) by gradually replacing negative emotions with Christlike counterparts. Bitterness and resentment, for example, can be dispelled and eventually replaced with divine pity or compassion through this enabling power.

I continue to marvel at the number of contemporary challenges addressed by the Book of Mormon. Like Nephi, the sons of Mosiah, and Captain Moroni, we too can have access to the grace and power available through the Holy Ghost, the priesthood, and our covenants. Our students need to know that exercising faith in Jesus Christ will enable them to find happiness, joy, and peace, despite the negative challenges that are a necessary part of the mortal experience. Although we will all experience our share of negative circumstances, it is critical that we not allow the emotions of the "natural man" to dominate our lives. Elder Richard G. Scott reminds us that negative experiences and the feelings usually associated with them need not be the defining characteristic of mortal life:

The challenges you face, the growth experiences you encounter, are intended to be temporary scenes played out on the stage of a life of continuing peace and happiness. Sadness, heartache, and disappointment are events in life. *It is not intended that they be the substance of life.* I do not minimize how hard some of these events

can be. When the lesson you are to learn is very important, trials can extend over a long period of time, *but they should not be allowed to become the confining focus of everything you do.* Your life can and should be wondrously rewarding. It is your understanding and application of the laws of God that will give your life glorious purpose as you ascend and conquer the difficulties of life. That perspective keeps challenges confined to their proper place—stepping-stones to further growth and attainment.¹⁶

We should not underestimate the influence of the positive environment of a gospel classroom where the scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon, are used to help students manage negative circumstances and emotions. The following note was written by an institute student following one of her classes: “I am so glad I came today! I’ve been trying to repent of some things and combined with school and other life stresses, life seems so discouraging at times. I was so tempted to miss institute today and just go home and take a nap before work. But it seems like your lesson today was for me. Thank you. God shows his love to me through other people very often. I felt so loved and hopeful while sitting in class today. It is so amazing to me that Heavenly Father is so mindful of each son and daughter. It makes my heart happy.” **RE**

Notes

1. David V. Erdman, ed., *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 494–95.

2. Pertinent scriptures include Alma 38:12 and 1 John 5:4–5. Conference talks include Boyd K. Packer, “Solving Emotional Problems in the Lord’s Own Way,” *Ensign*, May 1978, 91–93; Lynn G. Robbins, “Agency and Anger,” *Ensign*, May 1998, 80–81; Gordon B. Hinckley, “Our Solemn Responsibilities,” *Ensign*, November 1991, 49–51; David A. Bednar, “And Nothing Shall Offend Them,” *Ensign*, November 2006, 89–92; David A. Bednar, “Clean Hands and a Pure Heart,” November 2007, 80–83.

3. See Mayo Clinic Web site, www.mayoclinic.com/health/depression/DS00175

4. Gordon Livingston, M.D., *Too Soon Old, Too Late Smart: Thirty True Things You Need To Know* (New York: Marlowe & Company, 2004), 71.

5. See Thomas S. Monson, “School Thy Feelings, O My Brother,” *Ensign*, November 2009, 62, 67–69; Gordon B. Hinckley, “Our Solemn Responsibilities,” *Ensign*, November 1991, 49–51; Gordon B. Hinckley, “Keeping the Temple Holy,” *Ensign*, May 1990, 52.

6. See David A. Bednar, “And Nothing Shall Offend Them,” *Ensign*, November 2006, 89–92.

7. Cited in Betty Wein, “Pornography on the March,” *Reader’s Digest*, November 1987, 158.

8. Boyd K. Packer, “Personal Revelation: The Gift, the Test, and the Promise,” *Ensign*, November 1994, 61.

9. Boyd K. Packer, “The Candle of the Lord,” *Ensign*, January 1983, 56.

10. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 39; emphasis added.

11. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1943), 123.

12. John uses a metaphor of light and dark to describe the various spiritual, psychological, or emotional states we find ourselves in. “Walking in the light” is descriptive of our life when we are in harmony with God. “Walking in the darkness” is a description of our life when we are out of tune with God (see 1 John 1:5–10).

13. See 2 Nephi 5:5; Omni 1:12; Alma 27:10; also, Abraham found it “needful . . . to obtain another place of residence” (Abraham 1:1).

14. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Latter-day Counsel,” *Ensign*, October 2000, 73.

15. David A. Bednar, “Clean Hands and a Pure Heart,” *Ensign*, November 2007, 82.

16. Richard G. Scott, “The Atonement Can Secure Your Happiness and Peace,” *Ensign*, November 2006, 41; emphasis added.