

D&C 81-83

JOSEPH STUART: It's sort of remarkable to a Latter-day Saint living in 2021 to learn that there wasn't a formal organization of the first presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints until early 1832. Section 81 is given in the context of the Lord organizing that priesthood body, which consisted of Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Jesse Gause. Rigdon is a name that most Latter-Day saints know, but Gause is a name known only to the most prepared seminary trivia contest participants. Gause was a relatively new convert to the restored gospel.

Hi! My name is Joseph Stuart. I am the public communications specialist at the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for religious scholarship. Janiece Johnson is a Willes Center research associate at the Institute. Each week we will discuss the block of reading from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' "Come, Follow Me" curriculum. We aren't here to present a lesson, but rather to hit on a few key themes from the scripture block that we believe will help fulfill the Maxwell Institute's mission to inspire and fortify Latter-day Saints and their testimonies of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and engage the world of religious ideas.

STUART: By 1833, less than a year after Gause had been named a member of the first presidency, he had left the church, to be replaced by Fredrick G. Williams. Later, scribes crossed out Gause's name on this revelation and inserted William's, the man who replaced Gause in the first presidency, and I find this absolutely fascinating. I really like what the Joseph Smith Papers say, when in their research they found the published revelation in the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, the 1844 edition, and the 1844 issue of the *Times and Seasons*, all have William's name instead of Gause's. Which, the argument indicates, what Joseph Smith and others regarded as revelation is containing general information about the duties of a councilor rather than instructions specific to Gause.

I agree with this, but I think that it also speaks to something that is familiar to me, which is that sometimes we retrofit revelation to say that we knew the end from the beginning. This bad thing happened to me or this opportunity came to me after much tribulation and I knew exactly what was going to come. The answer to that, in my mind, is I'm glad for the optimism and for the faith that something good was going to come out of bad situation but we can't go back and change how we felt or how we were approaching a situation to match

perfectly so that we always know what we're expecting is coming from communication through the Holy Ghost.

More often, for me, revelation is something that I come to understand in the context of my particular situation. Just as scriptures hit me differently over the course of my life, or reading my patriarchal blessing at different points in my life, it helps me to appreciate and understand my spiritual experiences. I think that we can say the same thing about spiritual promptings that we have had in the past where we come to understand the bigger picture and how things have unfolded, but not until later on. I worry that sometimes we limit what a revelation's application may be, because we feel that it needs to match up with previous experiences that we have had. That we have a linear spiritual life, where we are steadily progressing onward and onward, rather than the messier reality that most of us are going up and down and up and down, having positive and negative experiences that, when understood correctly and understood through an eye of faith, can help us to become closer to our Heavenly Parents. Often, we don't know why we received a particular prompting or why we do the things that we do as we are doing them.

JANIECE JOHNSON: I think that's an important thing for us to remember. Culturally we really like stories where everything fits really nicely and we know exactly where we were prompted to do something or why we felt inspiration in a certain way at a certain time. But, oft times, we are working with limited information and we don't always know. We can't tie up every last story with a nice, neat little bow. At this point Jesse Gause walks out of church history and we know very little about the rest of his life—not with the Latter-day Saints or outside of the Latter-day Saints. We see how the Lord is preparing Fredrick and those who will be Joseph's counselors to serve. Looking at a couple of these verses in section 81 (verse 3), the Lord says to Joseph, and to whoever his councilor is at the time, that part of their calling in leadership is to be "in prayer always, vocally and in thy heart, in public and in private."

Now we all need prayer, but I've also often wondered about this admonition to pray vocally. Earlier the Lord asked Joseph Knight senior to "take up your cross in the which you must pray vocally and before the world as well as in secret and in your family and among your friends and in all places." The Lord knew this was hard for Joseph Knight, but he still

asked. Maybe it's the difference between thinking "I love you" and saying "I love you." Letting those words out into the air where you can't call them back is a very different thing.

For me, I think about when I came home from my mission. Now, I served a Spanish speaking mission in Argentina. In the MTC someone told me that I should try to pray in Spanish, and I did for all of my mission. But, when I came home and suddenly had to pray in English, it was really hard for me. I felt vulnerable praying like I had never felt before, because during my mission the only prayers that I had offered in English were the most desperate and the most personal.

STUART: Thank you for sharing that Janiece. I am reminded of something that President Henry B. Eyring said in his first address as a member of the First Presidency in a Priesthood session. He said, "Be prepared to lose track of time as you pray. You will feel love for the people you are to serve. You will feel their needs, their hopes, their hurts, and those of their families. And [as you pray] the circle will grow wider than you would imagine, to perhaps people not in your quorum or your family but to those they love across the world." When you forget yourself, to pray for the circle of others, your service will be extended in your heart. It will not change only your service, but your heart. That is because the Father and His beloved Son, whom you are called to serve, know and love so many people your service will touch, however limited to a few it may seem to you."

JOHNSON: I think that's lovely. That vulnerability, that perhaps we show when we kneel in humility and ask, that it has the capacity to open up our hearts in really remarkable and expansive ways. I think that it is important for us, but it is also important for those that we serve—for them to hear us pray for them and to make that attempt and that offering to communicate with the Lord. Serving those around us is an essential part of being a leader. Verses four and five say, "And in doing these things thou wilt do the greatest good unto thy fellow beings, and wilt promote the glory of him who is your Lord. Wherefore, be faithful; stand in the office which I have appointed unto you; succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees." Disciples orient themselves outwards. We consider how we can do the greatest good to our fellow beings. We succor the weak.

Now, the word "succor" is fascinating. It literally means "to run to the side of." If we look at the Oxford English dictionary we get a variety of different definitions here: 1. To help,

assist, or aid a person; 2. To furnish with military assistants, to bring reinforcements; 3. To relieve a besieged place; 4. To relieve or remedy a state of want or weakness ; 5. To relieve a diseased condition; 6. To shelter or protect; 7. And to strengthen, make firm, or taut. That's the nautical definition. Who knew there was a nautical definition!

I think about that word "succor." Alma uses it to describe Christ's suffering for us. That he suffered all the pains, afflictions, and temptations so that He might know how to succor us. But this is also what we, who choose to be his disciples, also do. We choose to succor those in need in the way that they need. Not necessarily in the way that we want to serve, but in the way that will help lift them up; that will help lift up their hands that hang down, and strengthen their feeble knees.

STUART: I see an intimacy to the term "succor." It's not a casual ministering or an unthinking offer of help. It seems to require a knowledge, not only of the person and the person's struggles, but what a person needs to be alleviated from the pain or crisis that they are in.

JOHNSON: I think that those definitions help us think about all the different ways we can serve, right? Whether it is military assistants that need reinforcements or someone who needs a place of shelter and to be welcomed in.

STUART: I'm glad you said that because it makes me think of two different times that I have been served by others: once served, and once succored. The first was after receiving some really tough news while I was an undergraduate student, and I was really disappointed. After listening to me, my roommate said, "well, I wish I could help you with your problem, but I can't, so let me buy you a burger." This cheeseburger ministry, as I've come to think about it, was fine for the moment but it didn't match another situation where I was in much more anguish and despair. I sought out another trusted friend who sat with me, listened to me, did their best to help me. Through their confidence, they helped me to move forward after another crushing disappointment.

There is a difference between intentional kindness, which is always welcome, and succoring someone which often turns someone to wanting to exercise faith to repentance.

It reminds me of what Elder Hugh B. Brown said in his wonderful address "God is the Gardner." Now, he's telling BYU students this at a convocations address. He's saying,

"Some of you as you go forward are going to meet with disappointments—perhaps many disappointments, some of them crucial. Sometimes you will wonder if God has forgotten you. Sometimes you may even wonder if He lives, and where He has gone. But in these times when so many are saying God is dead, and so many are denying his existence, I think I could not leave with you a better message than this: God is aware of you individually. He knows who you are and what you are, and, furthermore, He knows what you are capable of becoming. Be not discouraged, then, if you do not get all the things you want just when you want them. Have the courage to go on and face your life and, if necessary, reverse it to bring it into harmony with His law."

“Succor” to me, is the last part of Elder Brown's sermon. It is someone serving in such a way that they remind you of how your Heavenly Parents see you and what you can become. They grant you courage through their own courage, and encourage you to live your life in faithful perseverance.

Section 82 comes in the context of the vicious tarring and feathering of Joseph Smith and Sydney Rigdon. Only a week after they had been attacked by their neighbors, Joseph Smith traveled with several companions to Missouri to try and heal the divide between saints in Ohio and Missouri. You see, early Latter-Day saints had original rivalries and questions over authority and power that aren't familiar to Latter-Day saints today, in part, because we learn from the lessons of the past. Joseph was pleased that the Missouri saints sustained him.

Again, just the idea of the Prophet going to a different part of the country and having there be a question over whether he would be sustained is something not familiar to me as a Latter-day Saint, but is something that, nonetheless, we should think about. This was a church that was going through growing pains in figuring out how authority functioned, and how similar congregations would be across time and space. Smith was relieved and his

history records that the difficulty or hardness which had existed between Bishop Edward Partridge in Missouri and Elder Rigdon in Ohio, was amicably settled. "And when we came together in the afternoon all hearts seemed to rejoice." Joseph later received a revelation on the United Order or the organization that we now recognize as forming the infrastructure for living the Law of Consecration.

JOHNSON: Now, if we look at verse one of section 82, thinking about that amicable settlement between Rigdon and Partridge who are arguing during the conference, their hearts are run together in love, but the Lord says, "Verily, verily I say unto you my servants, that in as much as you have forgiven one another your trespasses, even so I the Lord forgive you." If we forgive, the Lord forgives, and sometimes that exacting request or that exacting commandment of the Lord is difficult. We are commanded to forgive everyone.

STUART: Yeah, and honestly that seems like a pretty tall order sometimes. This is purely my idea, but that sometimes forgiveness takes a long time for us to extend to others or for others to extend for us. I think that forgiveness is a process, as well as it is an event in which the breach is healed between two people.

JOHNSON: Just because the commandment to forgive is compact and concise doesn't mean the process of forgiveness is compact or concise. At times that requires a lot from us--the time that it takes to heal those breaches. Perhaps it could help us to think of Elder Holland, "Except in the case of his only Begotten Son," Elder Holland said, "imperfect people are all God has ever had to work with. That must be terribly frustrating to Him but He deals with it. So should we."

STUART: I can't tell you how often I think about that. Because I'm the type of personality that likes to think "oh, this is how I would do it," or "this is the way that I would approach it." In realizing that there is a difference between being right or having ideas and having the humility to say, "I'm going to follow what someone else has to say about this."

Moving on to section 82 an earlier revelation on the laws of the church outlined principles of consecration which defined consecration as a means of church members to take care of the poor among them. So this revelation instructs members to consecrate their properties to the church, meaning, make them legally available to the church, and then for bishops to

convey back stewardships that were sufficient for their needs and those of their families. So, you give all that you have to the church, and the bishop--as a judge in Israel, as a steward, and as someone who holds the keys for this--determines what you and your family need and gives you back what you want and need. With the excess being placed into a storehouse for them to have access to bless the needy with.

JOHNSON: I think that "according to wants and needs" is important. As a kid I thought that the law of consecration sounded like the worst possible thing because it was just having what we needed, and subsisting on what we needed and that sounded horrific to me. But it is according to their wants and needs. Now, sometimes we don't even think about consecration.

There is a folk doctrine that has kind of crept into the church, that the law of consecration ended with the introduction of tithing. President Hinkley reminded us, "the law of sacrifice and the law of consecration were not done away with and are still in effect." Elder Bednar reminds us that perhaps if we are not thinking about consecration and we have been through the temple, then perhaps we are not listening carefully, because the law of consecration is one of the covenants that we make in the temple. This doesn't mean that it's easy for us. Elder Maxwell said, "Many ignore consecration because it seems too abstract or too daunting, but the conscientious among us experience divine discontent. As we read these sections in the Doctrine and Covenants I hope we can think about, "Okay, how can this apply to me. How does this work for me?"

STUART: Absolutely, and crucially, this is something that as Richard Bushmen says in *Rough Stone Rolling*, Joseph Smith lays that as a theological imperative, not as a business plan. This is something that, for me as a Latter-day Saint living in the 21st century, I know that there are ways to operate within the church, that there are handbooks where they explain in detail how I should do hundreds of things within the church. From something like warming things up, rather than cooking them in the serving area and not the kitchen, to what questions a bishop or a member of the stake presidency should ask for a temple recommend interview.

In this plan [consecration] there were a lot of very high ideals but it was rather light on who had the responsibility for figuring out how it was going to work. Now today, in 2021, we have all sorts of mechanisms and processes for helping the poor in our communities. But we have to remember that in 1832 it wasn't always that way. There's almost nothing in the revelation about a division of responsibilities, how it's to be organized, the process of giving or receiving donations.

And again, to return to brother Bushmen, he wrote that, "One cannot tell if Joseph Smith understood just how much he was asking of his followers in requiring the consecration of property." Because equality was something that meant something different in 1832 than it means now. It meant equality before the law, not even necessarily the equality of opportunity. Which means that in 1832 women, people of black African descent, indigenous people, and many other ethnic and religious and gender minorities did not have equality before the law. It was an ideal that was something to be strived for, but that was not always met. Goodness knows that we have come a lot further than 1832, though we still have a long way to go.

We can remember, though, that the united firm lasted only about two years. The same length of time that other groups' experiments with these communitarian economic principles where people shared what they had in common during these exciting utopian driven decades of the 1830s. Which is to say that Latter-Day saints did about as well with living a communal form of consecration as other religious Americans did who sought to do the same thing.

JOHNSON: Today our context is different, but we still consider the principle of consecration and how it might be in effect for us. In verse 17, the Lord says, "You are to be equal, or in other words, you are to have an equal claim on the properties, for the benefit of managing the concerns of your stewardships, every man according to his wants and his needs, inasmuch as his wants are just." So, here, we've got a little bit of a caution on wants. I may want a Maserati, but that's not in my budget, currently. That is not a just want in my budget. And perhaps the Lord is asking us today to be thoughtful, to think about how we use the resources that have been given us. Verse 18 continues, "All this for the benefit of the church of the living God, that every man may improve upon his talent, that every man

may gain other talents, yea, even an hundred fold, to be cast into the Lord's storehouse, to become the common property of the whole church."

Now, we think about the parable of the Talents. We all have an opportunity to decide whether or not we are going to gain more with what the Lord has given us. Whether that be time, talents, or possessions--all those things that God has given us--we get to decide how we will become a steward over those things. Verse 19 reminds us of the responsibilities of disciples: "Every man seeking the interest of his neighbor, and doing all things with an eye single to the glory of God." The only object lesson that I have ever given is one regards this, "an I single to the glory of God." Maybe those of you who are listening can just choose something to focus on. Something in your view to focus entirely on. If we are focused entirely on the clock that we see in front of us, everything else around that clock gets a little bit fuzzy. In our peripheral vision it's not quite as clear. If we are only focused on the glory of God, then no matter how many distractions are around us, they are always a little bit fuzzy. They are always in the periphery, if we are focused on "an eye single to the glory of God." The interest of our neighbor, will always be central to the glory of God, and God asks us to be focused.

STUART: I think that focus is something that can be a little bit intimidating, at least for me. I think that if we see with "an eye single to the glory of God," and we have the same sort of fear that the all-seeing eye of Sauron in the *Lord of the Rings* brings to mind, we are doing things wrong. We want to be wholly focused on what we do being for the glory of God and for the benefit of their children, but also, we want it to be something like C. S. Lewis said that God operates like the sun, where he illuminates everything that we see and everything that we are able to interact with, not only the thing that we are to stare at and only think about one thing at a time.

JOHNSON: And perhaps going back to verse two in section 82 helps us to remember that we all fall short. None of us do this as well as we could. The Lord reminded those who had just been quarreling, "there are those among you who have sinned exceedingly;" but He reminds them, "yea, even all of you have sinned; but verily I say unto you, beware from henceforth, and refrain from sin." This is the foundational claim of Christianity that we are all sinners and we all fall short. We all need Christ.

STUART: "What good is the Savior who doesn't save anyone," as Doctor Stephen Robinson taught so memorably in his book, *Believing Christ*. In section 83, the biggest thing that came to mind for me was, in thinking about who we rely upon, that first we rely upon our family for help. But, then we—who are disciples of Christ who have consecrated our time, our talents, and those things with which we have been blessed to bless the children of God around us—it's important for us to recognize that we are our siblings' keeper. That we not only have the opportunity and the responsibility but the great joy of participating in God's work of helping others to become more like Him.

JOHNSON: I think that that's a great place for us to stop today. We will finish with a quote from President Sheri L. Dew, then a counselor in the Relief Society General Presidency. She quotes verse three from section 82:

We are unique because of our covenants, our spiritual privileges, and the responsibilities attached to both. We are endowed with power and gifted with the Holy Ghost. We have a living prophet to guide us, ordinances that bind us to the Lord and to each other, and the power of the priesthood in our midst. We understand where we stand in the great plan of happiness. And we know that God is our Father and that His Son is our unfailing Advocate. With these privileges comes great responsibility, for 'unto whom much is given much is required', and at times, the demands of discipleship are heavy. But shouldn't we expect the journey towards eternal glory to stretch us? We sometimes rationalize our preoccupation with this world and our casual attempts to grow spiritually by trying to console each other with the notion that living the gospel really shouldn't require all that much of us. The Lord's standard of behavior will always be more demanding than the world's, but then, the Lord's rewards are infinitely more glorious—including true joy, peace, and salvation.

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