

Things as They Really Are



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I raise an apostolic voice of warning about the potentially stifling, suffocating, suppressing, and constraining impact of some kinds of cyberspace interactions and experiences upon our souls.

As I have looked forward to and prepared for this opportunity to learn with you, I have come to better understand the strong feelings of Jacob, the brother of Nephi. He said, “I this day am weighed down with much ... desire and anxiety for the welfare of your souls” ([Jacob 2:3](#)). The message I want to share with you today has over time distilled upon my “soul as the dews from heaven” ([D&C 121:45](#)). I invite your earnest attention to a serious subject that has both immediate and eternal implications. I pray for the [Holy Ghost](#) to be with and teach each of us during our time together.

I long have been impressed with the simple and clear definition of truth set forth in the [Book of Mormon](#): “The Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. Wherefore, it speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be; wherefore, these things are manifested unto us plainly, for the salvation of our souls” ([Jacob 4:13](#); see also [D&C 93:24](#)).

We will focus upon the first major element of truth identified in this verse: “things as they really are.” We first will review several key elements of our Heavenly Father’s plan of happiness as the doctrinal foundation for knowing and understanding things as they really are. We then will consider methods of attack used by the adversary to distract us from or inhibit our capacity to discern things as they really are. And finally, we will discuss the responsibilities that rest upon you as the rising generation. You will need to be obedient, to honor sacred covenants, and to discern things consistently as they really are in today’s world that grows ever more confused and wicked.

Our Divine Destiny

In “The [Family](#): A Proclamation to the World,” the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles declare that as spirit sons and daughters of God, we “accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize [our] divine destiny as heirs of eternal life.”¹ Please note the primary importance of obtaining a physical body in the process of progressing toward our divine destiny.

The Prophet [Joseph Smith](#) taught with clarity the importance of our physical bodies:

“We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the celestial kingdom. The great principle of happiness consists in having a body. The devil has no body, and herein is his punishment. He is pleased when he can obtain the tabernacle of man, and when cast out by the Savior he asked to go into the herd of swine, showing that he would prefer a swine’s body to having none. All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not. ...

“The devil has no power over us only as we permit him; the moment we revolt at anything which comes from God, the devil takes power.”²

Our physical bodies make possible a breadth, a depth, and an intensity of experience that simply could not be obtained in our premortal estate. President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, has taught, “Our spirit and our body are combined in such a way that our body becomes an instrument of our mind and the foundation of our character.”³ Thus, our relationships with other people, our capacity to recognize and act in accordance with truth, and our ability to obey the principles and ordinances of the gospel of [Jesus Christ](#) are amplified through our physical bodies. In the classroom of mortality, we experience tenderness, love, kindness, happiness, sorrow, disappointment, pain, and even the challenges of physical limitations in ways that prepare us for eternity. Simply stated, there are lessons we must learn and experiences we must have, as the scriptures describe, “according to the flesh” ([1 Nephi 19:6](#); [Alma 7:12–13](#)).

Apostles and prophets consistently have taught the mortal and eternal importance of our bodies. Paul declared:

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

“If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are” ([1 Corinthians 3:16–17](#)).

And in this dispensation the Lord revealed that “the spirit and the body are the soul of man” ([D&C 88:15](#)). A truth that really is and always will be is that the body and the spirit constitute our reality and identity. When body and spirit are inseparably connected, we can receive a fulness of joy; when they are separated, we cannot receive a fulness of joy (see [D&C 93:33–34](#)).

The Father’s plan is designed to provide direction for His children, to help them become happy, and to bring them safely home to Him with resurrected, exalted bodies. Lucifer labors to make the sons and daughters of God confused and unhappy and to hinder their eternal progression. The

overarching intent of the father of lies is that all of us become “miserable like unto himself” ([2 Nephi 2:27](#)), and he works to distort the elements of the Father’s plan he hates the most.

Satan does not have a body, and his eternal progress has been halted. Just as water flowing in a riverbed is stopped by a dam, so the adversary’s eternal progress is thwarted because he does not have a physical body. Because of his rebellion, Lucifer has denied himself all of the mortal blessings and experiences made possible through a tabernacle of flesh and bones. He cannot learn the lessons that only an embodied spirit can learn. He cannot marry or enjoy the blessings of procreation and family life. He cannot abide the reality of a literal and universal [resurrection](#) of all mankind. One of the potent scriptural meanings of the word *damned* is illustrated in his inability to continue developing and becoming like our Heavenly Father.

Because a physical body is so central to the Father’s plan of happiness and our spiritual development, we should not be surprised that Lucifer seeks to frustrate our progression by tempting us to use our bodies improperly. One of the ultimate ironies of eternity is that the adversary, who is miserable precisely because he has no physical body, invites and entices us to share in his misery through the improper use of our bodies. The very tool he does not have and cannot use is thus the primary target of his attempts to lure us to physical and spiritual destruction.

The Adversary’s Attacks

The adversary attempts to influence us both to misuse our physical bodies and to minimize the importance of our bodies. These two methods of attack are important for us to recognize and to repel.

When any of Heavenly Father’s children misuse their physical tabernacles by violating the law of chastity, by using drugs and addictive substances, by disfiguring or defacing themselves, or by worshipping the false idol of body image, whether their own or that of others, Satan is delighted. To those of us who know and understand the plan of salvation, any defiling of the body is rebellion and a denial of our true identity as sons and daughters of God (see [Mosiah 2:36–37](#); [D&C 64:34–35](#)).

Now, brothers and sisters, I cannot tell you all the ways whereby you may misuse your bodies, “for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them” ([Mosiah 4:29](#)). You know what is right and what is wrong, and you have the individual responsibility to learn for yourself “by study and also by faith” ([D&C 88:118](#)) the things you should and should not do and the doctrinal reasons you should and should not do those things. I testify that as you desire to so learn, as you “watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives” ([Mosiah 4:30](#)), you will be spiritually enlightened and protected. And according to your faithfulness and diligence, you will have the power to discern the deception and repel the attacks of the adversary as he tempts you to misuse your physical body.

Satan also strives to entice the sons and daughters of God to minimize the importance of their physical bodies. This particular type of attack is most subtle and diabolical. I want to provide several examples of how the adversary can pacify and lull us away into a sense of carnal security (see [2 Nephi 28:21](#)) and encourage us to put at risk the earthly learning experiences that caused us to shout for joy in the premortal existence (see [Job 38:7](#)).

For example, all of us can find enjoyment in a wide range of wholesome, entertaining, and engaging activities. But we diminish the importance of our bodies and jeopardize our physical well-being by going to unusual and dangerous extremes searching for an ever-greater and more exhilarating adrenaline “rush.” We may rationalize that surely nothing is wrong with such seemingly innocent exploits and adventures. However, putting at risk the very instrument God has given us to receive the learning experiences of mortality—merely to pursue a thrill or some supposed fun, to bolster ego, or to gain acceptance—truly minimizes the importance of our physical bodies.

Sadly, some young men and young women in the Church today ignore “things as they really are” and neglect eternal relationships for digital distractions, diversions, and detours that have no lasting value. My heart aches when a young couple—sealed together in the house of the Lord for time and for all eternity by the power of the holy priesthood—experiences marital difficulties because of the addicting effect of excessive video gaming or online socializing. A young man or woman may waste countless hours, postpone or forfeit vocational or academic achievement, and ultimately sacrifice cherished human relationships because of mind- and spirit-numbing video and online games. As the Lord declared, “Wherefore, I give unto them a commandment . . . : Thou shalt not idle away thy time, neither shalt thou bury thy talent that it may not be known” ([D&C 60:13](#)).

You may now be asking yourself, “But, Brother Bednar, you began today by talking about the importance of a physical body in our eternal progression. Are you suggesting that video gaming and various types of computer-mediated communication can play a role in minimizing the importance of our physical bodies?” That is precisely what I am declaring. Let me explain.

We live at a time when technology can be used to replicate reality, to augment reality, and to create virtual reality. For example, a medical doctor can use software simulation to gain valuable experience performing a complicated surgical operation without ever putting a human patient at risk. A pilot in a flight simulator repeatedly can practice emergency landing procedures that could save many lives. And architects and engineers can use innovative technologies to model sophisticated design and construction methods that decrease the loss of human life and damage to buildings caused by earthquakes and other natural disasters.

In each of these examples, a high degree of fidelity in the simulation or model contributes to the effectiveness of the experience. The term *fidelity* denotes the similarity between reality and a representation of reality. Such a simulation can be constructive if the fidelity is high and the purposes are good—for example, providing experience that saves lives or improves the quality of life.

Please notice the fidelity between the representation of reality in the computer rendering (first image below) and the reality of the completed room (second image).



Rendering of sealing room in Newport Beach California Temple by Craig Lofgreen © IRI



Photograph of actual sealing room in Newport Beach California Temple by Welden C. Andersen © IRI

In the example, high fidelity is employed to accomplish a most important purpose—the design and construction of a sacred and beautiful temple. However, a simulation or model can lead to spiritual impairment and danger if the fidelity is high and the purposes are bad—such as experimenting with actions contrary to God’s commandments or enticing us to think or do things we would not otherwise think or do “because it is only a game.”

I raise an apostolic voice of warning about the potentially stifling, suffocating, suppressing, and constraining impact of some kinds of cyberspace interactions and experiences upon our souls. The concerns I raise are not new; they apply equally to other types of media, such as television, movies, and music. But in a cyber world, these challenges are more pervasive and intense. I plead with you to beware of the sense-dulling and spiritually destructive influence of cyberspace technologies that are used to produce high fidelity and that promote degrading and evil purposes.

If the adversary cannot entice us to misuse our physical bodies, then one of his most potent tactics is to beguile you and me as embodied spirits to disconnect gradually and physically from things as they really are. In essence, he encourages us to think and act as if we were in our premortal, unembodied state. And, if we let him, he can cunningly employ some aspects of modern technology to accomplish his purposes. Please be careful of becoming so immersed and

engrossed in pixels, texting, earbuds, twittering, online social networking, and potentially addictive uses of media and the Internet that you fail to recognize the importance of your physical body and miss the richness of person-to-person communication. Beware of digital displays and data in many forms of computer-mediated interaction that can displace the full range of physical capacity and experience.

Read carefully the following quote describing an intense romantic relationship a woman had with a cyberspace boyfriend. And note how the medium of communication minimized the importance of the physical body: “And so PFSlider [the man’s screen name] became my everyday life. All the tangible stuff fell away. My body did not exist. I had no skin, no hair, no bones. All desire had converted itself into a cerebral current that reached nothing but my frontal lobe. There was no outdoors, no social life, no weather. There was only the computer screen and the phone, my chair, and maybe a glass of water.”⁴

In contrast, we need to heed the admonition of Paul: “That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour” ([1 Thessalonians 4:4](#)).

Consider again the example I mentioned earlier of a young couple recently married in the house of the Lord. An immature or misguided spouse may devote an inordinate amount of time to playing video games, chatting online, or in other ways allowing the digital to dominate things as they really are. Initially the investment of time may seem relatively harmless, rationalized as a few minutes of needed relief from the demands of a hectic daily schedule. But important opportunities are missed for developing and improving interpersonal skills, for laughing and crying together, and for creating a rich and enduring bond of emotional intimacy. Progressively, seemingly innocent entertainment can become a form of pernicious enslavement.

To feel the warmth of a tender hug from an eternal companion or to see the sincerity in the eyes of another person as testimony is shared—all of these things experienced as they really are through the instrument of our physical body—could be sacrificed for a high-fidelity fantasy that has no lasting value. If you and I are not vigilant, we can become “past feeling” ([1 Nephi 17:45](#)), as did Laman and Lemuel long ago.

Let me provide another example of disconnecting gradually and physically from things as they really are. Today a person can enter into a virtual world, such as Second Life, and assume a new identity. An individual can create an avatar, or a cyberspace persona, that conforms to his or her own appearance and behavior. Or a person can concoct a counterfeit identity that does not correlate in any way to things as they really are. However closely the assumed new identity approximates the individual, such behavior is the essence of things as they really are not. Earlier I defined the fidelity of a simulation or model. I now emphasize the importance of personal fidelity—the correspondence between an actual person and an assumed, cyberspace identity. Please note the lack of personal fidelity in the following episode as reported in the *Wall Street Journal*:

Ric Hoogestraat is “a burly [53-year-old] man with a long gray ponytail, thick sideburns and a salt-and-pepper handlebar mustache. ... [Ric spends] six hours a night and often 14 hours at a

stretch on weekends as Dutch Hoorenbeek, his six-foot-nine, muscular ... cyber-self. The character looks like a younger, physically enhanced version of [Ric]. ...

“... [He] sits at his computer with the blinds drawn. ... While his wife, Sue, watches television in the living room, Mr. Hoogestraat chats online with what appears on the screen to be a tall, slim redhead.

“He’s never met the woman outside of the computer world of Second Life, a well-chronicled digital fantasyland. ... He’s never so much as spoken to her on the telephone. But their relationship has taken on curiously real dimensions. They own two dogs, pay a mortgage together and spend hours [in their cyberspace world] shopping at the mall and taking long motorcycle rides. ... Their bond is so strong that three months ago, Mr. Hoogestraat asked Janet Spielman, the 38-year-old Canadian woman who controls the redhead, to become his virtual wife.

“The woman he’s legally wed to is not amused. ‘It’s really devastating,’ says Sue Hoogestraat, ... who has been married to Mr. Hoogestraat for seven months.”⁵

Brothers and sisters, please understand. I am not suggesting all technology is inherently bad; it is not. Nor am I saying we should not use its many capabilities in appropriate ways to learn, to communicate, to lift and brighten lives, and to build and strengthen the Church; of course we should. But I am raising a warning voice that we should not squander and damage authentic relationships by obsessing over contrived ones. “Nearly 40% of men and 53% of women who play online games said their virtual friends were equal to or better than their real-life friends, according to a survey of 30,000 gamers conducted by ... a recent Ph.D. graduate from Stanford University. More than a quarter of gamers [who responded indicated that] the emotional highlight of the past week occurred in a computer world.”⁶

How important, how enduring, and how timely is the Lord’s definition of truth: “things as they really are.” The prophet Alma asked, “O then, is not this real?” ([Alma 32:35](#)). He was speaking of light and good so discernible they can be tasted. Indeed, “they who dwell in [the Father’s] presence ... see as they are seen, and know as they are known, having received of his fulness and of his grace” ([D&C 76:94](#)).

My beloved brothers and sisters, beware! To the extent personal fidelity decreases in computer-mediated communications and the purposes of such communications are distorted, perverted, and wicked, the potential for spiritual disaster is dangerously high. I implore you to turn away immediately and permanently from such places and activities (see [2 Timothy 3:5](#)).

Now I would like to address an additional characteristic of the adversary’s attacks. Satan often offers an alluring illusion of anonymity. Lucifer always has sought to accomplish his work in secret (see [Moses 5:30](#)). Remember, however, that apostasy is not anonymous simply because it occurs in a [blog](#) or through a fabricated identity in a chat room or virtual world. Immoral thoughts, words, and deeds always are immoral, even in cyberspace. Deceitful acts supposedly veiled in secrecy, such as illegally downloading music from the Internet or copying CDs or DVDs for distribution to friends and families, are nonetheless deceitful. We are all accountable

to God, and ultimately we will be judged of Him according to our deeds and the desires of our hearts (see [Alma 41:3](#)). “For as [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he” ([Proverbs 23:7](#)).

The Lord knows who we really are, what we really think, what we really do, and who we really are becoming. He has warned us that “the rebellious shall be pierced with much sorrow; for their iniquities shall be spoken upon the housetops, and their secret acts shall be revealed” ([D&C 1:3](#)).

I have raised a voice of warning about only a few of the spiritual hazards in our technologically oriented and rapidly changing world. Let me say again: neither technology nor rapid change in or of itself is good or evil; the real challenge is to understand both within the context of the eternal plan of happiness. Lucifer will encourage you to misuse and to minimize the importance of your physical body. He will attempt to substitute the monotony of virtual repetition for the infinite variety of God’s creations and convince us we are merely mortal things to be acted upon instead of eternal souls blessed with moral agency to act for ourselves. Deviously, he entices embodied spirits to forfeit the blessings and learning experiences “according to the flesh” ([1 Nephi 19:6](#); [Alma 7:12–13](#)) that are made possible through the Father’s plan of happiness and the Atonement of His Only Begotten Son.

For your happiness and protection, I invite you to study more diligently the doctrine of the plan of salvation—and to prayerfully ponder the truths we have reviewed. I offer two questions for consideration in your personal pondering and prayerful studying:

1. Does the use of various technologies and media invite or impede the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost in your life?
2. Does the time you spend using various technologies and media enlarge or restrict your capacity to live, to love, and to serve in meaningful ways?

You will receive answers, inspiration, and instruction from the Holy Ghost suited to your individual circumstances and needs. I repeat and affirm the teaching of the Prophet Joseph: “All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not. The devil has no power over us only as we permit him.”

These eternal truths about the importance of our physical bodies will fortify you against the deception and the attacks of the adversary. One of my deepest desires for you is an ever-increasing testimony of and appreciation for the Resurrection—even your own resurrection with a celestial, exalted body “because of your faith in [the Lord Jesus Christ] according to the promise” ([Moroni 7:41](#)).

The Rising Generation

I would like to speak specifically to you as you really are. You really are the rising generation in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In October of 1997, Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles visited Brigham Young University–Idaho to speak in a devotional. During the day he was on the campus, we talked together about a variety of gospel topics in general and about the youth of the Church in particular. I remember Elder

Maxwell making a statement that greatly impressed me. He said, “The youth of this generation have a greater capacity for obedience than any previous generation.”

He then indicated that his statement was based upon a truth taught by President George Q. Cannon (1827–1901), First Counselor in the First Presidency: “God has reserved spirits for this dispensation who have the courage and determination to face the world, and all the powers of the evil one, visible and invisible, to proclaim the gospel and maintain the truth and establish and build up the Zion of our God fearless of all consequences. He has sent these spirits in this generation to lay the foundation of Zion never more to be overthrown, and to raise up a seed that will be righteous, and that will honor God, and honor Him supremely, and be obedient to Him under all circumstances.”⁷

Parents and Church leaders frequently emphasize that the young men and young women of this generation have been reserved for this season in the history of the world and are some of the most valiant of Heavenly Father’s children. Indeed, such statements are true. But I often have wondered if young people hear this description so often that it becomes overused and trite—and that its importance and deep implications may be overlooked. We know that “unto whom much is given much is required” ([D&C 82:3](#)). And the teachings of President Cannon and Elder Maxwell help us to understand more fully what is required of us today. You and I are to be valiant and “obedient to Him under all circumstances.” Thus, obedience is the principal weapon upon which the rising generation must rely in the latter-day battle between good and evil.

We rejoice that the Lord through His authorized servants has “raised the bar” for the young men and young women of today. Given what we know about who we are and why we are here upon the earth, such inspired direction is welcomed and appreciated. And we should recognize that Lucifer incessantly strives to “lower the bar” by coaxing us to misuse and minimize the importance of our physical bodies.

The Savior has warned us repeatedly to beware of deception by the adversary:

“Jesus answered, and said unto them: Take heed that no man deceive you; ...

“For in those days there shall also arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch, that, if possible, they shall deceive the very elect, who are the elect according to the covenant ...

“And whoso treasureth up my word, shall not be deceived” ([Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:5, 22, 37](#)).

Obedience opens the door to the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost. And the spiritual gifts and abilities activated by the power of the Holy Ghost enable us to avoid deception—and to see, to feel, to know, to understand, and to remember things as they really are. You and I have been endowed with a greater capacity for obedience precisely for these reasons. Moroni declared:

“Hearken unto the words of the Lord, and ask the Father in the name of Jesus for what things soever ye shall stand in need. Doubt not, but be believing, and begin as in times of old, and come unto the Lord with all your heart, and work out your own salvation with fear and trembling before him.

“Be wise in the days of your probation; strip yourselves of all uncleanness; ask not, that ye may consume it on your lusts, but ask with a firmness unshaken, that ye will yield to no temptation, but that ye will serve the true and living God” ([Mormon 9:27–28](#)).

As we heed that inspired counsel, we can and will be blessed to recognize and repel the attacks of the adversary—today and in the days that lie ahead. We can and will fulfill our foreordained responsibilities and contribute to the work of the Lord in all the world.

I testify that God lives and is our Heavenly Father. He is the author of the plan of salvation. Jesus is the Christ, [the Redeemer](#), whose body was bruised, broken, and torn for us as He offered the atoning sacrifice. He is resurrected, He lives, and He stands at the head of His Church in these latter days. To be “encircled about eternally in the arms of his love” ([2 Nephi 1:15](#)) will be a real and not a virtual experience.

I testify we can and will be blessed with the courage and determination to face the world and all the powers of the evil one. Righteousness will prevail. No unhallowed hand can stop this work from progressing. I bear witness and testify of these things as they really are and as they really will be, in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.