

**A Christ-Centered Life, Chapter 24 in TOPC:
Ezra Taft Benson (2014)**

President Ezra Taft Benson frequently quoted the Savior's counsel to the twelve Nephite disciples: "What manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am" (3 Nephi 27:27).¹ This principle—the need to be more Christlike—was a recurring theme in President Benson's ministry, especially during his service as President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and as President of the Church.

Having dedicated his life to serving the Lord, President Benson spoke with power and conviction when he shared the following words of testimony:

"I testify to you that there is no greater, more thrilling, and more soul-ennobling challenge than to try to learn of Christ and walk in His steps. Our model, Jesus Christ, walked this earth as 'the Exemplar.' He is our Advocate with the Father. He worked out the great atoning sacrifice so we could have a fullness of joy and be exalted in accordance with His grace and our repentance and righteousness. He did all things perfectly and commands that we be perfect even as He and His Father are perfect. (See 3 Ne. 12:48.)

"What would Jesus do?" or "What would He have me do?" are the paramount personal questions of this life. Walking in His way is the greatest achievement of life. That man or woman is most truly successful whose life most closely parallels that of the Master."²

As President Benson exhorted the Saints to follow the Savior's perfect example, he reminded them that they could do so only with the Savior's help. He declared:

"I know the Lord lives. I know that He loves us. I know that apart from Him no one can succeed, but as a partner with Him no one can fail.

"I know that God can make a lot more out of our lives than we can.

"May we all have the moral courage from this moment forward to more fully strive each day to think on Christ, learn of Him, walk in His steps, and do what He would have us do."³

"Jesus saith ... , I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson

1

The example and teachings of Jesus Christ provide the great standard for all mankind.

Two thousand years ago a perfect man walked the earth: Jesus the Christ. He was the son of a heavenly father and an earthly mother. He is the God of this world, under the Father. He taught men truth, that they might be free. His example and precepts provide the great standard, the only sure way, for all mankind.⁴

No other single influence has had so great an impact on this earth as the life of Jesus the Christ. We cannot conceive of our lives without his teachings. Without him we would be lost in a mirage of beliefs and worships, born in fear and darkness where the sensual and materialistic hold sway. We are far short of the goal he set for us, but we must never lose sight of it; nor must we forget that our great climb toward the light, toward perfection, would not be possible except for his teachings, his life, his death, and his resurrection.

... We must learn and learn again that only through accepting and living the gospel of love as taught by the Master and only through doing his will can we break the bonds of ignorance and doubt that bind us. We must learn this simple, glorious truth so that we can experience the sweet joys of the spirit now and eternally. We must lose ourselves in doing his will. We must place him first in our lives.⁵

In the 14th chapter of John, Jesus is tenderly saying his farewell to his disciples after the last supper. He tells them that he goes to prepare a place for them in his Father's house; that where he is, they also may be. And Thomas says to him:

"Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?"

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:5–6.) The road lies before us. It is clearly marked.⁶

2

We come unto Christ as we look unto Him in every thought and emulate His attributes.

In Book of Mormon language, we need to "believe in Christ and deny him not." (2 Ne. 25:28.) We need to

trust in Christ and not in the arm of flesh. (See 2 Ne. 4:34.) We need to “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him.” (Moro. 10:32.) We need to come “with a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Ne. 12:19), hungering and thirsting after righteousness (see 3 Ne. 12:6). We need to come “feasting upon the word of Christ” (2 Ne. 31:20), as we receive it through His scriptures, His anointed, and His Holy Spirit.

In short, we need to follow “the example of the Son of the living God” (2 Ne. 31:16).⁷

The Lord said, “Look unto me in every thought.” (D&C 6:36.) Looking unto the Lord in every thought is the only possible way we can be the manner of men and women we ought to be.

The Lord asked the question of His disciples, “What manner of men ought ye to be?” He then answered His own question by saying, “Even as I am.” (3 Ne. 27:27.) To become as He is, we must have Him on our mind—constantly in our thoughts. Every time we partake of the sacrament, we commit to “always remember him.” (Moro. 4:3; 5:2; D&C 20:77, 79.)

If thoughts make us what we are, and we are to be like Christ, then we must think Christlike thoughts. Let me repeat that: If thoughts make us what we are, and we are to be like Christ, we must think Christlike thoughts.

... Our thoughts should be on the Lord. We should think on Christ.⁸

Let our personal lives, our homes, and our work performance reflect our Christlike character. So live that others will say about you, “There is a true Christian!”

Yes, we believe in Jesus Christ, but more—we look to Him, we trust Him and strive to emulate His attributes.⁹

Christ is our ideal. He is our exemplar. ... The best measure of true greatness is how Christlike we are.¹⁰

To be like the Savior—what a challenge for any person! He is a member of the Godhead. He is the Savior and Redeemer. He was perfect in every aspect of His life. There was no flaw nor failing in Him. Is it possible for us ... to be even as He is? The answer is yes. Not only can we, but that is our charge, our responsibility. He would not give us that commandment if He did not mean for us to do it [see Matthew 5:48; 3 Nephi 12:48].

The Apostle Peter spoke of the process by which a person can be made a partaker “of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). This is important, for if we truly become partakers of the divine nature, we shall become like Him. Let us examine closely what Peter teaches us about this process. Here is what he said:

“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

“And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

“And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity” (2 Peter 1:5–7).

The virtues outlined by Peter are part of the divine nature, or the Savior’s character. These are the virtues we are to emulate if we would be more like Him. Let us discuss a few of these important traits.

The first characteristic, to which all the others are added, is faith. Faith is the foundation upon which a godlike character is built. ...

Peter goes on to say that we must add to our faith virtue. ... Virtuous behavior implies that [a person] has pure thoughts and clean actions. He will not lust in his heart, for to do so is to “deny the faith” and to lose the Spirit (D&C 42:23)—and there is nothing more important in this work than the Spirit. ...

Virtue is akin to holiness, an attribute of godliness. [We] should actively seek for that which is virtuous and lovely and not that which is debasing or sordid. Virtue will garnish [our] thoughts unceasingly (see D&C 121:45). How can any man indulge himself in the evils of pornography, profanity, or vulgarity and consider himself totally virtuous? ...

The next step Peter describes in the growth process is to add knowledge to our faith and virtue. The Lord has told us that “it is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance” (D&C 131:6). In another place God commanded, “Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118). ... While any study of truth is of value, the truths of salvation are the most important truths any person can learn. The Lord’s question, “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Matthew 16:26) can be applied to educational pursuits as well as the pursuit of worldly goods. The Lord might also have asked, “For what is a man profited, if he shall

learn everything in the world and not learn how to be saved?" ...

Joining our spiritual education to our secular learning will help us keep focused on the things that matter most in this life. ...

Another attribute described by Peter as being part of the divine nature is temperance. [A temperate person] is restrained in his emotions and verbal expressions. He does things in moderation and is not given to overindulgence. In a word, he has self-control. He is the master of his emotions, not the other way around.

...

To our temperance we are to add patience. ... Patience is another form of self-control. It is the ability to postpone gratification and to bridle one's passions. In his relationships with loved ones, a patient man does not engage in impetuous behavior that he will later regret. Patience is composure under stress. A patient man is understanding of others' faults.

A patient man also waits on the Lord. We sometimes read or hear of people who seek a blessing from the Lord, then grow impatient when it does not come swiftly. Part of the divine nature is to trust in the Lord enough to "be still and know that [he is] God" (D&C 101:16).

A [person] who is patient will be tolerant of the mistakes and failings of his loved ones. Because he loves them, he will not find fault nor criticize nor blame.

Another attribute mentioned by Peter is kindness. ... One who is kind is sympathetic and gentle with others. He is considerate of others' feelings and courteous in his behavior. He has a helpful nature. Kindness pardons others' weaknesses and faults. Kindness is extended to all—to the aged and the young, to animals, to those low of station as well as the high.

These are the true attributes of the divine nature. Can you see how we become more Christlike as we are more virtuous, more kind, more patient, and more in control of our emotional feelings?

The Apostle Paul used some vivid expressions to illustrate that a member of the Church must be different from the world. He commended us to "put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27), "put off ... the old man," and "put on the new man" (Ephesians 4:22, 24).

The final and crowning virtue of the divine character is charity, or the pure love of Christ (see Moroni 7:47). If we would truly seek to be more like our Savior and Master, then learning to love as He loves should be our highest goal. Mormon called charity "the greatest of all" (Moroni 7:46).

The world today speaks a great deal about love, and it is sought for by many. But the pure love of Christ differs greatly from what the world thinks of love. Charity never seeks selfish gratification. The pure love of Christ seeks only the eternal growth and joy of others. ...

The Savior declared that life eternal is to know the only true God and His Son Jesus Christ (see John 17:3). If this is true, and I bear you my solemn witness that it is true, then we must ask how we come to know God. The process of adding one godly attribute to another, as described by Peter, becomes the key to gaining this knowledge that leads to eternal life. Note Peter's promise, which immediately follows the process described:

"For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:8; italics added).

... I pray that these qualities and attributes of the Savior may abound in us so that when we stand at the Judgment and He asks each one of us, "What manner of man are you?" we can raise our heads in gratitude and joy and answer, "Even as thou art."¹¹

3

The Savior will comfort us and lift us up in our efforts to stay on the path He has marked for us.

To the extent that we stray from the path marked out for us by the Man of Galilee, to that extent we are failing in our individual battles. ... But we are not without his help. Again and again he told his disciples, and all of us, "Let not your heart be troubled. ..."

"If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it."

"I will not leave you comfortless. ..."

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. ..." (John 14:1, 14, 18, 27.)¹²

Let us turn again to the Book of Mormon ... to learn some principles about coming unto Christ, being committed to Him, centered in Him, and consumed in

Him. We will quote but a few of the numerous passages on the matter.

First, we need to know that Christ invites us to come unto Him. “Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, ... Yea, he saith: Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life” (Alma 5:33–34).

Come, for he stands “with open arms to receive you” (Mormon 6:17).

Come, for “he will console you in your afflictions, and he will plead your cause” (Jacob 3:1).

“Come unto him, and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him” (Omni 1:26).

As Moroni closed the record of the Jaredite civilization, he wrote, “I would commend you to seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have written” (Ether 12:41).

In Moroni’s closing words written toward the end of the Nephite civilization, he said, “Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, ... and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you” (Moroni 10:32).

Those who are committed to Christ “stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places” that they may be in “even until death” (Mosiah 18:9). They “retain the name” of Christ “written always” in their hearts (Mosiah 5:12). They take upon themselves “the name of Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end” (Moroni 6:3).

When we live a Christ-centered life, “we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ” (2 Nephi 25:26). We “receive the pleasing word of God, and feast upon his love” (Jacob 3:2). Even when Nephi’s soul was grieved because of his iniquities, he said, “I know in whom I have trusted. My God hath been my support” (2 Nephi 4:19–20).

We remember Alma’s counsel: “Let all thy doings be unto the Lord, and whithersoever thou goest let it be in the Lord; yea, let all thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever. Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings” (Alma 37:36–37).

“Remember, remember,” said Helaman, “that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, ... that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, ... [they] shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery” (Helaman 5:12).

Nephi said, the Lord “hath filled me with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh” (2 Nephi 4:21). Those who are consumed in Christ “are made alive in Christ” (2 Nephi 25:25). They “suffer no manner of afflictions, save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ” (Alma 31:38). They are “clasped in the arms of Jesus” (Mormon 5:11). Nephi said, “I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul” (2 Nephi 33:6). Lehi said, “I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love” (2 Nephi 1:15). ...

... That great soul Mormon [wrote a] letter to his beloved son, Moroni, with these words:

“My son, be faithful in Christ; and may not the things which I have written grieve thee, to weigh thee down unto death; but may Christ lift thee up, and may his sufferings and death, and the showing his body unto our fathers, and his mercy and long-suffering, and the hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind forever.

“And may the grace of God the Father, whose throne is high in the heavens, and our Lord Jesus Christ, who sitteth on the right hand of his power, until all things shall become subject unto him, be, and abide with you forever” (Moroni 9:25–26).

My prayer for each of us is that we too will follow that inspired counsel: “Be faithful in Christ.” Then He will lift us up and His grace will be and abide with us forever.¹³