

*“The Atonement Heals, Comforts, Consoles, and Enables Us
to Show Mercy and Grace unto Ourselves”*

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One of the great blessings of my current assignment is to serve side by side with these two remarkable women as we work together to serve the women of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints of all ages. We are unified in vision and in purpose. We do not see ourselves as being responsible for just one specific age group; rather, we feel deeply an urgency to work closely together in one single cause—to help children, youth, and adults to make sacred covenants and come unto Jesus Christ. I learn and am inspired daily through my association with Sister Rosemary Wixom and Sister Linda Burton. I truly love these women as well as all of our counselors.

I testify that the greatest event in all the history of mankind is the Atonement of our Savior, Jesus Christ. The Atonement is what gives our lives meaning, and without it, we have no hope or joy in this life.

If you will indulge me today, I want to share the personal journey which led me to this testimony. I was born into a Latter-day Saint home. I was taught about the Atonement in my home and in my Church classes growing up. I thought I had a good, basic understanding of what the Atonement was and of the role of Jesus Christ in our Heavenly Father’s plan for us. I felt I had faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior. It is almost embarrassing to admit that it was not until I was married and was the mother of several small children that I came to realize that it is not enough to simply *know about* the Atonement. The Atonement must become personal and individualized, and we must all recognize the absolute necessity of the Atonement in each of our lives before we can fully draw upon the Savior’s enabling power. I believe the Savior taught this principle when He invited the 2,500 individuals at the temple in the land Bountiful to come and see and feel for themselves the prints of the nails in His hands and in His feet. “And this they did do, going forth one by one until they had *all* gone forth, and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come” (3 Nephi 11:15; emphasis added). When He invited

the people to come to Him one by one, He taught that it is essential that our testimonies be individual and personal.

I was 25 years old when my husband and I were called to serve as mission president and wife in Göteborg, Sweden. We took four small children with us, including a one-month-old baby. It was an exciting but challenging time for us—and especially for me. I was struggling to care for a newborn and three other young children while traveling around our mission to meet our missionaries and members. I was running into restrooms as often as I could manage to nurse a newborn while trying to cover the meetings and assignments I felt were necessary. I was dealing with a foreign language and was expected to be a hostess in arranging and preparing dinners for missionaries and leaders. I wasn't familiar with the grocery store and didn't understand the language well enough to know what was in a can of food when I picked it up. Thank heavens for the pictures on cans and packages! In the midst of all these changes and challenges, I began to feel not only inadequate but unworthy.

In retrospect, I may have been suffering in one degree or another from depression following the birth of my baby. What I was feeling was very intense and very real. I knew that generally speaking, I was a good person and hadn't committed any major sins, but I felt as if every weakness, fault, and sin I had ever committed was being brought to my remembrance. I was struggling to meet the demands of my calling, and I wondered if I was acceptable in the eyes of the Lord, especially in my current situation.

I turned to the scriptures, to personal prayer, and to my husband for a priesthood blessing and counsel during this period. Slowly I began to understand an important truth and to find relief. I realized that I could not do what I needed to do on my own. I needed help. I needed to apply the Atonement to my challenges, shortcomings, and deficiencies. Jesus Christ had already suffered for my sins, my trials, and my problems, and yet I was trying to carry them all on my own. I needed to accept His infinitely generous offer and let Him help carry my burdens. At some point, the Atonement of Christ was no longer an abstract principle of the gospel but a certainty and a sure reality. It became the lifeline which I reached out to hold onto in order to survive spiritually. I needed the Atonement to work for me. I was totally and completely dependent on what Christ had done for me personally to have any hope at all for help in this life and exaltation in the next.

Practically speaking, I went through the following steps. I asked for forgiveness of my shortcomings and tried to become a more patient and giving person. I realized that repentance is a daily necessity and that it simply means we are trying to be better each day. I prayed to understand how to prioritize the various things commanding my time. I tried to put the needs of my children first and to turn the things I just couldn't manage over to others—and to the Lord. I had to work at letting the Lord take over the many things I worried about. I prayed and I studied my scriptures. I learned to listen to the promptings of the Spirit more than ever and trust that the Lord understood me and stood ready to prompt and help. The busyness of my life didn't change, but my ability to handle things increased. I have never viewed the Atonement in the same way since.

I think that each individual in this life needs to come to the same realization. Everyone, without exception, needs the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. In the words of the prophet Helaman, who was quoting King Benjamin, "There is no other way nor means whereby man can

be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, who shall come; yea, remember that he cometh to redeem the world” (Helaman 5:9).

A few years ago, my husband and I had the opportunity to visit the Holy Land. It was something I had dreamed of for many years. We traveled with my sister, one of my brothers, and their spouses, and we shared some wonderful experiences together. Our small group was given the opportunity to spend time alone in a private portion of the Garden of Gethsemane. The olive trees there are ancient and twisted. We were given the chance to read quietly and wander around freely. It was a quiet, reflective time as we pondered the events which had occurred there. My sister and I stood together in the Garden Tomb, where it is believed the Savior’s body lay after His Crucifixion. We looked at one another in wonder.

As I reflect on our experiences in the Holy Land, one memory stands out above all the rest. We had the opportunity to partake of the sacrament while we were there, and we drank the water from small cups carved from olive wood. As I was drinking, I noticed that something in the wood gave the water a very bitter taste. Immediately a scripture came into my mind: “I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning” (3 Nephi 11:11).

The taste of that bitter water in my mouth, combined with the experiences and sights of the previous few days, caused a swelling of gratitude to fill my heart for what Jesus Christ had done for me. I felt a confirmation of the reality of the Savior’s sacrifice and felt amazement at the love He has for each of us.

We do not have to travel to the Holy Land to appreciate the Atonement of Jesus Christ. We understand it as we study the scriptures, listen to the words of our living prophets and apostles, and accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior.

It has been said that the Bible describes what happened in the Atonement, and the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants explain the doctrine. The Atonement is an event of monumental significance, and yet there are amazingly few verses in the New Testament which describe it. No wonder most of the world lacks a true understanding of it. It is in the dozen or so sermons in the Book of Mormon, the modern revelations of the Doctrine and Covenants, and the words of our latter-day prophets that we truly come to understand the significance of what Jesus experienced. One of the “aha moments” in the Book of Mormon is the teaching that not only did Christ suffer for all mankind’s sins; he also experienced every kind of pain and misery known to mankind in a way that would have killed any mortal person.

King Benjamin teaches us, “And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people” (Mosiah 3:7).

In a memorable talk, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland described that in the Savior’s final moments on the cross, God “the Father briefly withdrew from Jesus the comfort of His Spirit, the support of His personal presence. It was required, indeed it was central to the significance of the Atonement,

that this perfect Son who had never spoken ill nor done wrong nor touched an unclean thing had to know how the rest of humankind—us, all of us—would feel when we did commit such sins. For His Atonement to be infinite and eternal, He had to feel what it was like to die not only physically but spiritually, to sense what it was like to have the divine Spirit withdraw, leaving one feeling totally, abjectly, hopelessly alone” (“None Were with Him,” *Ensign*, May 2009).

Think of this! The only perfect man who has ever lived on the earth, the Creator of the universe, the literal Son of God, a member of the Godhead, was willing to do all of this for us—we who are imperfect, weak, and unworthy. He loved us enough to suffer all of that—for you and for me. To me it is beyond comprehension.

The Atonement of Jesus Christ is real and it is personal. Just as the Savior invited the people in the Book of Mormon to come “one by one” and witness His reality for themselves, He continues to invite us to believe and accept what He did for us—one by one. We must each, in our own way, examine the wounds Jesus received on our behalf and decide whether or not to accept Him as our personal Savior and Redeemer. I testify that as we accept His great sacrifice and allow Him to change our lives, we will never be the same. Of these things I testify in the holy name of Jesus Christ, amen.