

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

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Forty years ago President Ezra Taft Benson told us, “Nothing is going to startle us more when we pass through the veil to the other side than to realize how well we know our Father and how familiar His face is to us” (“Jesus Christ—Gifts and Expectations,” in *Speeches of the Year, 1974 [1975]*, 313). I cannot repeat that quote enough—for each time I do, I feel at home. I can only imagine the joy of also recognizing the face of the Savior and feeling the warmth of His embrace. He promises us, “Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you” (D&C 88:63).

In our weaknesses, we do draw near unto Him, and each time we do, He shows mercy and grace unto us. Let me share an example.

Soon after I was called as the Primary general president I was assigned to speak at a regional conference in the Salt Lake Conference Center. In my talk, I spoke about the importance of talking and listening to our children. I told a story of Sister Susan Heaton from Elgin, Illinois. I used her very words as they were printed in the October 1998 *Ensign*. I quote:

“One busy evening I heard a little voice coming from our youngest daughter’s bedroom: ‘Mom, could you come here? ... You forgot to talk me in!’ ... ‘Talk me in’ really made a great deal of sense.

“At one point when our children were small, I got into the habit of watching a few favorite television programs—in fact, they were quite important to me. I looked forward all day to sitting in front of the TV to watch them. Unfortunately, the programs came on at the same time the children went to bed.

“I don’t remember exactly when it happened, but at one point I realized I had put my programs at the top of my list and my children farther down. For a while I tried reading bedtime stories with the TV on, but I knew in my heart it wasn’t the best way.”

Now let’s push pause in Sister Heaton’s story.

We could stop right here and say, “Exhibit no. 1: Obvious weakness of mother watching TV over caring for her children.” Oh, we could easily point our fingers at Sister Heaton and shake our heads. But wait, there’s more to her story. She goes on to say:

“As I pondered about the days and weeks I had lost to my TV habit, I began to feel guilty and decided to change. It took a while to convince myself that I could really turn off the TV.

“After about two weeks of leaving the television off, I felt a burden somehow lifted. I realized I felt better, even cleaner somehow, and I knew I had made the right choice. The subsequent months and years of ‘talking children in’ have been valuable to me.”¹

I love Sister Heaton’s story. I love it because it is an inspiring story about talking and listening to children, and I love it for another reason.

In the days and weeks that followed my telling of her experience in my talk, I received numerous comments and notes from people who heard my talk and related to the experience but thought Sister Heaton’s story was my story because I told it in first person, in her very words. Some missed my reference to her as the storyteller. Many of them expressed surprise that a general officer of the Church would be so open as to admit to a TV habit in a regional conference talk. At first I was dismayed, but then I thought: “No. Thank you, Sister Susan Heaton. You are not the only one who has character flaws. I’m right there with you. I could tell a story similar to your story about myself. How many times have I felt the remorse of repetitive choices I have made when I lacked the courage to change? If there are those who interpret your story, Sister Heaton, as mine, so be it. If just one person, besides myself, feels not alone in admitting to a weakness and finds hope through your example, I celebrate! Your story is an example of how through the grace of Jesus Christ a desire to change begins in our hearts, and that desire gives us the strength to draw upon the enabling power of the Savior’s Atonement.

“Sister Heaton, you give us hope that we too can find the courage to change and be obedient. It requires humility to seek change in our lives, and then only with the Lord’s grace, as you put it, we feel a burden lifted, we feel better and ‘even cleaner somehow.’”

Moroni said, “If men [and women] come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men [and women] weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men [and women] that humble themselves before me; for if they humble

themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27).

Moroni teaches us a principle when he begins with the phrase “if men [and women] come unto me,” meaning that it’s not about being a certain person, it is about coming unto Him and becoming His. Elder Bruce C. Hafen said, “If you’re seeing more of your weaknesses, that just might mean you’re moving nearer to God, not farther away” (“The Atonement: All for All,” *Ensign*, May 2004).

We come unto Him when we say, “I give. I’m yours. I do need Thee every hour. Here is my heart—take all that I have and let everything else slough off.”

King Benjamin said that possibility to change occurs when we become “as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, [and] full of love.” Like a child, we turn to our Father and we put our trust in Him and we yield “to the enticings of the Holy Spirit” (Mosiah 3:19).

We need the Atonement of Jesus Christ in our lives—as it heals, comforts, consoles, and enables us to show mercy and grace unto ourselves. How many times have we stood at our kitchen sinks and whispered, “Lord, please give me the strength to endure. Please give me the strength to forgive, to move on, the strength to embrace a child who is wayward, the strength to accept my circumstances and have hope for the future. Lord, please give me strength to simply expand my time, to curb a habit or elevate my thinking. I need the strength to draw closer to Thee and to be better than I can be on my own.” It’s true—because of Him, we can have a fresh start.

President Ezra Taft Benson taught us that we do know our Heavenly Father. Here on earth we are in the process of remembering what we once knew. At the same time, we are learning that He knows us and loves each one of us personally.

The Lord knew Samuel, a five-year-old boy. He called him by name three times in the night before Eli helped the young boy recognize the voice of the Lord. We read, “And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of His words fall to the ground” (1 Samuel 3:19).

The Lord knew Joseph Smith. At age 14 Joseph knelt and prayed to the Father. He said, “I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name” (Joseph Smith—History 1:17).

The Lord knew Emma Smith. We read, “Hearken unto the voice of the Lord your God, while I speak unto you, Emma Smith, my daughter” (D&C 25:1). The Lord knew Emma so well that He spoke to her strengths, her fears and her weaknesses. He said, “Lay aside the things of this world, and seek for the things of a better” (D&C 25:10).

The Lord knows each one of our names. His love for us is beyond our comprehension. When we recognize His hand in every detail of our lives, it is similar to hearing Him call us by name. The Lord said to Emma, “Thou art an elect lady, whom I have called” (D&C 25:3). Would He not have the same message for each one of His daughters?

He knows us like He knows Georgia Marriott, a 22-year-old vibrant young woman, a senior in violin performance attending Indiana University. Georgia delighted in the goodness of people and in her love for the Savior, Jesus Christ. Her goal was to testify to someone each day of Him and His restored gospel. Georgia was riding her bike to class one September morning in 2002 when she was hit by a truck. She left this mortal existence knowing and loving her Savior, Jesus Christ. She knew that He loved her. She wrote these words in her journal just one week before she died:

“(I) hold triumphantly the torch of Christ! I want that faith always and I want that hope always. I want to be that light. Christ makes it all possible for me because He’s been showing me little by little that I am of worth. He is the definition of what I am truly inside and want to become. As I see that, I forget my worries and realize that I am founded on Him, and I have no fear because He is with me! I forget myself. . . . I am secure on His rock, and then I can focus on others, on the gospel, on exerting myself to good and building on Him. Then I progress, then I feel joy! Life holds no chains for me because I am liberated by that inherent Light given to me before this world. I know the Light is there because of Christ’s Atonement. He gave (His) all to serve us and let us be like Him.”

Georgia continues, “Let us have joy! Oh, don’t you see, can’t everyone see that He is our God and Savior? He is the Christ, and those words are finally becoming real and moving to me.”

Georgia now knows how familiar His face is.

There is a Primary song entitled, “I Know That My Savior Loves Me” (Words and music by Tami Jeppson Creamer and Derena Bell) with the words, “I did not touch Him or sit on His knee, yet Jesus is real to me. I know He lives! I will follow faithfully. My heart I give to Him. I know that my Savior loves me.”

I want to close with my testimony that I know that He lives. He is real. As we look for His hand in our lives, our love for Him will increase. We won’t let our weaknesses discourage us—instead we will look forward to the opportunities to change and become better. We will seek a new level of hope and understanding.

Only through the Atonement of Jesus Christ may we become better than we can even imagine we could become. Humbling our hearts and submitting our will to His opens the door to a world of serenity away from the storms. Through His mercy and grace, He welcomes everyone to enter that door. It begins with our desire. We will feel ourselves drawing nearer to our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. It’s simply about living the gospel the best we can and looking for small and simple ways to be more obedient.

Then “when he shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see him as he is” (Moroni 7:48).

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

ⁱ “Talk Time Instead of TV Time,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1998, 73.