

## Sister Barbara B. Smith

### Light of the gospel

My beloved brethren and sisters, "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1)—or, in the words of the Joseph Smith translation, "In the beginning was the gospel preached through the Son. And the gospel was the word." (JST John 1:1.) And further, "In [the Son] was the gospel, and the gospel was the life, and the life was the light of men" (JST John 1:4).

Sadly, not all men and women enjoy the light that was intended for them. Not all who have the gospel know how to bring its radiance into their lives.

One woman felt she had little or no light in her life. Her husband spent three days of each week traveling out of town because of his work. This left her home alone to manage their house and two small children. She was just nineteen when they were married. She had almost no experience in caring for young children, and certainly felt no confidence in handling her own. She often found their demands and the pressing household duties overwhelming. In her frustration, she grew increasingly harsh with them until her abusive behavior became frightening, even to herself. Feeling alone, ashamed, and inadequate, she was often in the depths of despair. What light did the gospel offer to her?

She and her husband considered themselves good members of the Church. But what difference did that make when the children were crying, the laundry piled higher and higher, the letter from her mother remained unanswered, and the dress she was to make this week for her husband's company party lay unfinished on the sewing machine? All these frustrations spoke so loudly the discouragement of the present. They

made the blessings of the gospel seem very far away.

### Love—more than a concept

Fortunately, there were those who helped her learn to apply the principles of the gospel in solving many of her problems. Her visiting teachers, responding to her anxiety over her children, brought a special toy for each child. They had carefully selected playthings that an adult could use with a child in a delightful but problem-solving way. They took time to show the mother how to relate to her children through activity. She was surprised to find how happy and responsive the children were. They began to look forward to a playtime association with their mother. She realized that she was providing for their needs through play, and that they were becoming more relaxed with her.

Because of the relationship they were establishing through their activities together, the children were more willing to do as their mother asked—to pick up their clothes, put their toys away, and take their naps. This, in turn, helped her have more time to organize her other responsibilities. She learned to be considerate of her children and sensitive to their concerns. She has continued giving the children this special attention each day. Love in this home is now more than a concept; it is the way they respond to each other's needs.

### Actions and attitudes

The word of the gospel as it is preached and learned is, for each of us, the beginning. "Knowing" alone is not always sufficient to bring the promised light. We have to live by every word. We speak often in our worldwide Church about translation.

Computers are being employed to assist, and hundreds of language specialists are engaged in this important work. But the translation for which we each bear personal responsibility is converting the words of the gospel into actions, attitudes, and habits.

The gospel principle of love suggests action in the injunction to "love one another" (John 13:34). When these words are translated into a determined effort to change a behavior that brings hurt or embarrassment or sorrow to one who loves you, it becomes a key to solving a family problem. These few lines, written by a wife to her husband, underscore the need to make a principle more than a word:

"Valentine's Day 1951

"Dear Bill,

"I feel I love you more today than I have in all our twenty-three years together. Although you have always told me of your affection, nothing has so convinced me that you really care as your recent preparation to take our family to the temple.

"In spite of the exciting things we had done together, there has always been, for me, a sadness, a kind of lingering unhappiness, because we weren't really one. I am filled now with great expectation and joy when I think of the closeness we can have in studying the gospel together, in sharing the same friends, and, above all, the eternities that are now possible for us with our children and their children and theirs.

"My admiration for you has grown as I have seen you succeed in the difficult struggle to give up enslaving habits that had become so much a part of you.

"Your sons, your daughters, and I are not only extremely proud, but deeply grateful too.

"Love,  
"Ellen"

### Serve one another

Not all marital unhappiness stems from obvious bad habits. Some problems develop silently, almost imperceptibly, as we are involved in taxing schedules and multiple demands. Consider the couple who had spent all their married years in devotion to Church and children. The children were now grown and had left home; church callings were less demanding; and unexpectedly, they who had spent years helping others resolve difficulties, faced problems of their own. Preoccupied with serving their children, they had forgotten to serve each other. Quick to lavish affection on those about them, they had neglected sharing simple expressions of love and concern with one another. Now, in the time when they might enjoy the richness of their experiences together, they found their relationship strained. Each felt a sense of falling short which easily led to criticism and complaint. Their years of church activity, however, had taught them a better way. They had experienced the light of the gospel and longed for it now.

They found that by taking a fresh view of gospel principles, this time as a means of solving their own problems, they could relearn how to serve one another. They realized that expressing their affection in those mellowing years together brought a sweetness and satisfaction that was especially rewarding. They selected some projects on which they worked together around their home; they found meaningful church activity, prepared family records and histories, and learned how to preserve other valuable documents. Already, in the gospel, they had the principles they needed, and found them more than adequate as they brought them to bear on their own problems.

### Solve problems with the materials at hand

G. K. Chesterton in an essay entitled "A Piece of Chalk" wrote of going into the countryside in the south of England to draw with his colored chalks—only to find, ruefully, that he was missing the color white. Being too far from a store to remedy the situation, he felt his expedition ruined until he suddenly realized that the rock upon which he sat was, in fact, white chalk. (In Robert K. Thomas, ed., *The Joy of Reading*, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1978, 35–40.)

There, in a Sussex meadow, he was "sitting on an immense warehouse of white chalk." For him to think he had no chalk was like a chemist in the middle of the ocean looking for salt water to perform experiments or someone in the vast Sahara searching for sand to fill an hour glass. Many times the solutions to our problems await only our discovery that we already have the key to the answer. The need is for us to learn to use it effectively.

We see this continually in people's lives. One example was the woman who had little money to spend but wanted to share a Christmas treat with her neighbors. She didn't feel that she could buy even inexpensive containers, but she was quite self-reliant. With what she had on hand, she made charming remembrances using brown lunch-size paper bags decorated with a white paper roof, a door and windows, and the words "Merry Christmas, Neighbor!" These brown-bag houses, filled with her home-dried apple slices, were welcome gifts.

This same kind of ingenuity in working out problems with what one already has can be seen in the attractive jackets a mother made for her children out of the boys' old jeans. In each case, work, service, love, and self-reliance were the keys

that opened the way for solving problems and fulfilling needs.

### Strength of family and of character

Many problems are severe and debilitating. They cause fear and guilt and heartache. Often, the difference in people's finding their way or discovering solutions is the kindly, understanding friendship we can provide for them in our priesthood and Relief Society meetings or other Church settings. Many times it is the sympathetic arm around the shoulder and the encouraging smile that give to the distressed hope and to the downtrodden courage to try again. We can help them know that others wrestle with problems, too; but strength of family and of character, developed through living gospel principles, has enabled them to rise above life's difficulties.

One such family was left by the father when the youngest child was four months old. It was a traumatic time with a difficult divorce, but the courageous mother was full of faith and determined that she would do everything she could to succeed as a single parent.

She found, as many do, that the gospel, when translated into action, not only provides a key to solving many welfare problems, but it can also prevent them. Difficulties that could lead to dependency can be resolved and bring, instead, strength and happiness.

This mother gathered her children about her and explained their situation. There were back payments due on the house, current bills of every sort, and no income. They *could* turn to others for help; but if they were willing to work together as a family, she thought they could keep their house and make it, once more, a happy home. They were willing. Every child who was old enough found a way to help earn

some money. They cut lawns, delivered papers, tended babies, collected aluminum cans, did housework. One of the older children took the responsibility for the gas bill, another for the lights; the mother put her earnings toward the house payments. They limited other spending to bare necessities.

In time, the house payments were caught up. They were able to meet their other obligations and actually invest in some small, inexpensive properties they could fix up to generate income. This enabled the mother to be at home. With these ends achieved, the children no longer needed to contribute all their earnings to the family's physical requirements. With freedom from financial threat, the mother now suggested to her children that if they wanted to continue to work they could attend college, go on missions, and even travel and see the world together. The children did continue to earn and save their money. They learned the value of work and of family, and they have accompanied their mother to places others only dream of.

All this has been done while fulfilling their Church obligations. They are quick to testify that the greatest reward they have received from the experiences of the past few years has been their spiritual growth. Putting such principles as *love, work, service, self-reliance, and consecration* into practice has brought to this family the dignity of accomplishment, a unity of purpose, and a closeness to one another and to the Lord that is immediately apparent when one is in their company.

### Living gospel principles

Life does present problems, and although the gospel provides a means for finding answers, the resolutions do not always come quickly. There are, however, desirable strengths we

develop by striving against difficulties. It is often when struggling to the very extremity of our power that we come to know that our Father in Heaven is close.

Sariah, the wife of Lehi, had the wrenching experience of leaving their home and their possessions to travel in the wilderness. We are not told of the trials she may have experienced; but going on foot, living in tents, and cooking over an open fire could have been devastating after their comfortable life in Jerusalem. We do read of her anguished waiting when she feared her beloved sons had perished in their return to obtain the plates. (See 1 Nephi 5:2.) But in spite of troubles, she did love and serve her family. With the return of her sons, she knew of a certainty that the Lord had commanded her husband to flee into the wilderness, and in their safe return she found the assurance that the Lord was with them. (See 1 Nephi 5:8.) Their circumstances did not change; they still slept in tents. But she had joy and comfort in the knowledge that the Lord was guiding them. In that light she could carry on and meet further difficulties as they came.

For each of us, whatever our knowledge of the gospel, can continue to learn. But learning is just the beginning. The fulness of blessings comes as we adopt the principles and live our lives by them. When we make them our way, when we live the principles, we are promised that they will be a light unto us. As we come to know that light, it will lead us through the midst of darkness, and as we begin to bring that light into our homes, it can become a beacon to our children, and to their children, and to theirs.

May we press on, with a perfect brightness of hope, overcome our problems, and enjoy the love of God and of all men, I humbly pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.