

A House of Sequential Order

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“Sequential order” is a simple, natural, and effective way for the Lord to teach us, as His children, important principles.

In my professional life and in my service in the Church, I have done this thousands of times—just never before the 15 men seated directly behind me. I feel your prayers and theirs.

Brothers and sisters, I am a native of the Kingdom of Tonga in the South Pacific but was raised in North America. The pandemic has kept hundreds, perhaps thousands of young Tongan missionaries serving around the world from returning to their beloved homeland because of its closed borders. Some Tongan elders have been on their missions for three years and sisters over two years! They wait patiently with the faith for which our people are known. Meanwhile, don’t be too alarmed if some of them serving in your wards and stakes are looking increasingly more like me—aging and gray. We’re grateful for missionaries everywhere for their devoted service, even when longer or shorter than they had anticipated because of the pandemic.

One Sunday when I was a deacon, I was in the foyer with a tray of water passing the sacrament when a woman walked into the building. Dutifully, I approached and handed her the tray. She nodded, smiled, and took a cup of water. She had arrived too late to receive the bread. Shortly after this experience, my home teacher, Ned Brimley, taught me that many aspects and blessings of the gospel of Jesus Christ are given to us in sequential order.

Later that week, Ned and his companion came to our home with a memorable lesson. Ned reminded us that there was order to how God created the earth. The Lord took great care in explaining to Moses the order in which He created the earth. First, He started by dividing the light from the darkness, then water from dry land. He added plant life and animals before introducing to the newly formed planet His greatest creation: humankind, beginning with Adam and Eve.

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The sequential order in which the earth was created gives us a glimpse not only of what is most important to God but also why and for whom He created the earth.

Ned Brimley punctuated his inspired lesson with a simple statement: “Vai, God’s house is one of order. He expects you to live your life with order. In proper sequence. He wants you to serve a mission before you get married.” To this point, Church leaders currently teach that “the Lord expects each able young man to prepare to serve. ... Young women ... who desire to serve should also prepare” (*General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 24.0, ChurchofJesusChrist.org). Brother Brimley continued: “God wants you to get married before you have children. And He wants you to continually develop your talents as you earn an education.” If you choose to live your life out of sequence, you will find life more difficult and chaotic.

Brother Brimley also taught us that through His atoning sacrifice, the Savior helps us to restore order to our lives made chaotic or out of sequence by our own or others’ poor choices.

From that time on, I’ve had a fascination with “sequential order.” I developed a habit of looking for sequential patterns in life and in the gospel.

Elder David A. Bednar taught this principle: “As we study, learn, and live the gospel of Jesus Christ, sequence often is instructive. Consider, for example, the lessons we learn about spiritual priorities from the order of the major events that occurred as the fulness of the Savior’s gospel was restored in these latter days.”

Elder Bednar listed the First Vision and Moroni’s initial appearance to Joseph Smith as teaching the boy prophet first, the nature and character of God, followed by the role the Book of Mormon and Elijah would play in gathering Israel on both sides of the veil in this last dispensation.

Elder Bednar concludes: “This inspiring sequence is instructive about the spiritual matters of highest priority to Deity” (“The Hearts of the Children Shall Turn,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2011, 24).

One observation I’ve made is that “sequential order” is a simple, natural, and effective way for the Lord to teach us, as His children, important principles.

We’ve come to earth to learn and gain experience we would not otherwise have. Our growth is unique to each of us individually and a vital component of Heavenly Father’s plan. Our physical and spiritual growth begins in stages and develops slowly as we gain experience sequentially.

Alma gives a powerful sermon on faith—drawing on the analogy of a seed, which, if

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The Lord teaches us individually according to our capacity to learn and how we learn. Our growth is dependent on our willingness, natural curiosity, level of faith, and understanding.

Nephi was taught what Joseph Smith would learn in Kirtland, Ohio, over 2,300 years later: “For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom” (2 Nephi 28:30).

That we learn “line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little” is again sequential.

Consider the following statements we’ve heard most of our lives: “First things first” or “Feed them milk before meat.” How about “We have to walk before we run”? Each of these axioms describes something that is sequential.

Miracles operate according to sequential order. Miracles occur when we first exercise faith. Faith precedes the miracle.

Young men are also ordained to offices of the Aaronic Priesthood in sequence, according to the age of the one being ordained: deacon, teacher, and then priest.

The ordinances of salvation and exaltation are sequential in nature. We are baptized prior to receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. Temple ordinances are similarly sequential. Of course, as my friend Ned Brimley so wisely taught me, the sacrament is sequential—it begins with the bread, followed by the water.

“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.

“And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;

“For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:26–28).

In Jerusalem and in the Americas, the Savior instituted the sacrament in the exact same order.

“Behold, mine house is a house of order, saith the Lord God, and not a house of confusion” (Doctrine and Covenants 132:8).

Repentance is sequential. It begins with faith in Jesus Christ, even if just a particle. Faith requires humility, which is an essential element of having a “broken heart and a contrite spirit” (2 Nephi 9:7).

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King Benjamin taught his people this important truth: “And see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength. And again, it is expedient that he should be diligent, that thereby he might win the prize; therefore, all things must be done in order” (Mosiah 4:27).

May we live our lives with order and seek to follow the sequence the Lord has outlined for us. We will be blessed as we look for and follow the patterns and the sequence in which the Lord teaches what’s most important to Him. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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