

The Powerful, Virtuous Cycle of the Doctrine of Christ

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I invite you to live the doctrine of Christ repeatedly, iteratively, and intentionally and help others on their way.

Years ago, my wife, Ruth; our daughter, Ashley; and I joined other tourists on a kayaking excursion in the state of Hawaii in the United States. A kayak is a low-to-the-water, canoe-like boat in which the rower sits facing forward and uses a double-bladed paddle to pull front to back on one side and then on the other. The plan was to row to two small islands off the coast of Oahu and back again. I was confident because, as a young man, I had paddled kayaks across mountain lakes. Hubris never bodes well, does it?

Our guide gave us instructions and showed us the ocean kayaks we would use. They differed from the ones I had previously paddled. I was supposed to sit on top of the kayak, instead of down inside it. When I got onto the kayak, my center of gravity was higher than I was accustomed to, and I was less stable in the water.

As we started out, I rowed faster than Ruth and Ashley. After a while, I was far ahead of them. Though proud of my heroic pace, I stopped paddling and waited for them to catch up. A large wave—about 13 centimeters¹—hit the side of my kayak and flipped me over into the water. By the time I had turned the kayak upright and struggled to get back on top, Ruth and Ashley had passed me by, but I was too winded to resume paddling. Before I could catch my breath, another wave, this one truly enormous—at least 20 centimeters²—hit my kayak and flipped me over again. By the time I managed to right the kayak, I was so out of breath I feared I would not be able to climb on top.

Seeing my situation, the guide rowed over and steadied my kayak, making it easier for me to climb on top. When he saw that I was still too breathless to row on my own, he hitched a towrope to my kayak and began paddling, pulling me along with him. Soon I caught my breath and began paddling adequately on my own. He let go of the rope, and I reached the first island without further assistance. Upon arrival, I flopped down on the sand, exhausted.

After the group had rested, the guide quietly said to me, “Mr. Renlund, if you just keep paddling, maintaining your momentum, I think you’re going to be fine.” I followed his advice as we paddled to the second island and then back to our starting point. Twice the guide rowed by and told me I was doing great. Even larger waves hit my kayak from the side, but I was not flipped over.

By consistently paddling the kayak, I maintained momentum and forward progress, mitigating the effect of waves hitting me from the side. The same principle applies in our spiritual lives. We become vulnerable when we slow down and especially when we stop.³ If we maintain spiritual momentum by continually “rowing” toward the Savior, we are safer and more secure because our eternal life depends on our faith in Him.⁴

Spiritual momentum is created “over a lifetime as we repeatedly embrace the doctrine of Christ.”⁵ Doing so, President Russell M. Nelson taught, produces a “powerful virtuous cycle.”⁶ Indeed, the elements of the doctrine of Christ—such as faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance, entering a covenant relationship with the Lord through baptism, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end⁷—are not intended to be experienced as one-time, check-the-box events. In particular, “enduring to the end” is not really a separate step in the doctrine of Christ—as though we complete the first four elements and then hunker down, grit our teeth, and wait to die. No, enduring to the end is repeatedly and iteratively applying the other elements of the doctrine of Christ, creating the “powerful virtuous cycle” that President Nelson described.⁸

Repeatedly means that we experience the elements of the doctrine of Christ over and over throughout our lives. *Iteratively* means that we build on and improve with each repetition. Even though we repeat the elements, we are not just spinning in circles without a forward trajectory. Instead, we draw closer to Jesus Christ each time through the cycle.

Momentum involves both speed and direction.⁹ If I had paddled the kayak vigorously in the wrong direction, I could have created significant momentum, but I would not have reached the intended destination. Similarly, in life, we need to “row” toward the Savior to come unto Him.¹⁰

Our faith in Jesus Christ needs to be nourished daily.¹¹ It is nourished as we pray daily, study the scriptures daily, reflect on the goodness of God daily, repent daily, and follow the promptings of the Holy Ghost daily. Just as it is not healthy to defer eating all our food until Sunday and then binge our weekly allotment of nutrition, it is not spiritually healthy to restrict our testimony-nourishing behavior to one day in the week.¹²

When we assume responsibility for our own testimonies,¹³ we gain spiritual momentum and gradually develop bedrock faith in Jesus Christ, and the doctrine of Christ becomes central to the purpose of life.¹⁴ Momentum likewise builds as we strive to obey the laws of God and repent. Repentance is joyful and allows us to learn from our mistakes, which is how we progress eternally. We will undoubtedly have times when we flip over in our kayaks and find ourselves in deep water. Through repentance, we can get back on top and continue, no matter how many times we have fallen off.¹⁵ The important part is that we do not give up.

The next element of the doctrine of Christ is baptism, which includes the baptism of water and, through confirmation, the baptism of the Holy Ghost.¹⁶ While baptism is a singular event, we renew our baptismal covenant repeatedly when we partake of the sacrament. The sacrament does not replace baptism, but it links the initial elements in the doctrine of Christ—faith and repentance—with reception of the Holy Ghost.¹⁷ As we conscientiously partake of the sacrament,¹⁸ we invite the Holy Ghost into our lives, just like when we were baptized and confirmed.¹⁹ As we keep the covenant described in the sacrament prayers, the Holy Ghost becomes our companion.

As the Holy Ghost exerts a greater influence in our lives, we progressively and iteratively develop Christlike attributes. Our hearts change. Our disposition to do evil diminishes. Our inclination to do good increases until we only want “to do good continually.”²⁰ And we thereby access the heavenly power needed to endure to the end.²¹ Our faith has increased, and we are ready to repeat the powerful, virtuous cycle again.

Forward spiritual momentum also propels us to make additional covenants with God in the house of the Lord. Multiple covenants draw us closer to Christ and connect us more strongly to Him. Through these covenants, we have greater access to His power. To be clear, baptismal and temple covenants are not, in and of themselves, the source of power. The source of power is the Lord Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father. Making and keeping covenants create a conduit for Their power in our lives. As we live according to these covenants, we eventually become inheritors to all that Heavenly Father has.²² The momentum produced by living the doctrine of Christ not only powers the transformation of our divine nature into our eternal destiny but also motivates us to help others in appropriate ways.

Consider how the expedition guide helped me after I flipped over in the kayak. He did not shout from afar an unhelpful question such as, “Mr. Renlund, what are you doing in the water?” He did not paddle up and chide me, saying, “Mr. Renlund, you would not be in this situation if you were more physically fit.” He did not start towing my kayak while I was just trying to get on top of it. And he did not correct me in front of the group. Instead, he gave me the help I needed at the time I needed it. He gave me advice when I was receptive. And he went out of his way to encourage me.

As we minister to others, we do not need to ask unhelpful questions or state the obvious. Most people who are struggling know that they are struggling. We should not be judgmental; our judgment is neither helpful nor welcome, and it is most often ill-informed.

Comparing ourselves to others can lead us to make pernicious errors, especially if we conclude that we are more righteous than those who are struggling. Such a comparison is like drowning hopelessly in three meters²³ of water, seeing someone else drowning in four meters²⁴ of water, judging him a greater sinner, and feeling good about yourself. After all, we are all struggling in our own way. None of us earns salvation.²⁵ We never can. Jacob, in the Book of Mormon, taught, “Remember, after [we] are reconciled unto God, that it is only in and through the grace of God that [we] are saved.”²⁶ We all need the Savior’s infinite Atonement, not just part of it.

We do need all our compassion, empathy, and love as we interact with those around us.²⁷ Those who are struggling “need to experience the pure love of Jesus Christ reflected in [our] words and actions.”²⁸ As we minister, we encourage others frequently and offer help. Even if someone is not receptive, we continue to minister as they allow. The Savior taught that “unto such shall ye continue to minister; for ye know not but what they will return and repent, and come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I shall heal them; and ye shall be the means of bringing salvation unto them.”²⁹ The Savior’s job is to heal. Our job is to love—to love and minister in such a way that others are drawn to Jesus Christ. This is one of the fruits of the powerful, virtuous cycle of the doctrine of Christ.

I invite you to live the doctrine of Christ repeatedly, iteratively, and intentionally and help others on their way. I testify that the doctrine of Christ is central to Heavenly Father’s plan; it is, after

all, His doctrine. As we exercise faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement, we are propelled along the covenant path and motivated to help others become faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. We can become heirs in Heavenly Father's kingdom, which is the culmination of faithfully living the doctrine of Christ. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Only about five inches.
2. Only about eight inches.
3. In physics, momentum = mass × velocity. When we stop, the velocity is zero. Therefore, the product of mass and velocity becomes zero, regardless of our prior momentum or the mass.
4. See Russell M. Nelson, "The Power of Spiritual Momentum," *Liahona*, May 2022, 98. President Nelson counseled, "We have never needed *positive* spiritual momentum more than we do now." That's the best way to move "forward amid ... fear and uncertainty." See also 2 Nephi 2:6–7; 9:23–24.
5. Russell M. Nelson, "Overcome the World and Find Rest," *Liahona*, Nov. 2022, 97.
6. Russell M. Nelson, "Overcome the World," 97.
7. The phrase "the doctrine of Christ" means the same as the phrase "the gospel of Jesus Christ." See 2 Nephi 31:2–21; 3 Nephi 9:14–22; 11:7–41; 27:1–21.
8. Disengaging from any of the elements in the doctrine of Christ slows or stops our spiritual momentum. See 2 Nephi 28:30; Alma 12:10–11; Doctrine and Covenants 20:31–34; 50:24.
9. In physics, momentum = mass × velocity. Velocity is the speed in combination with the direction of motion of an object. Velocity is a vector and is inherently directional.
10. See 2 Nephi 2:6–7; 9:23–24.
11. See Russell M. Nelson, "The Power of Spiritual Momentum," 99.
12. See Colossians 2:6–7.
13. See Russell M. Nelson, "Overcome the World," 97. Underlining the importance of our testimonies in maintaining spiritual momentum, the statement by President Nelson to take charge of our testimonies was also quoted by President M. Russell Ballard (see "Follow Jesus Christ with Footsteps of Faith," *Liahona*, Nov. 2022, 35) and Elder Quentin L. Cook (see "Be True to God and His Work," *Liahona*, Nov. 2022, 120).
14. See "The Restoration of the Fulness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ: A Bicentennial Proclamation to the World," Gospel Library; Russell M. Nelson, "A Plea to My Sisters," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2015, 97.
15. See Mosiah 26:30; Alma 34:31; Moroni 6:8; Doctrine and Covenants 58:42.
16. See 2 Nephi 31:13.

17. Elder James E. Talmage wrote, “In the course of our study of the principles and ordinances of the Gospel, as specified in the fourth of the Articles of Faith, the subject of the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper very properly claims attention, the observance of this ordinance being required of all who have become members of the Church of Christ through compliance with the requirements of faith, repentance, and baptism by water and of the Holy Ghost” (*The Articles of Faith*, 12th ed. [1924], 171).
18. See Doctrine and Covenants 59:9.
19. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Special Witnesses of Christ,” *Ensign*, Apr. 2001, 13; *Liahona*, Apr. 2001, 14.
20. Mosiah 5:2.
21. See, for instance, 2 Nephi 31:2–21; 3 Nephi 11:23–31; 27:13–21; Moroni 4:3; 5:2; 6:6; Doctrine and Covenants 20:77, 79; 59:8–9.
22. See Doctrine and Covenants 14:7; 84:33–38.
23. About 10 feet.
24. About 13 feet.
25. See Ephesians 2:8–9.
26. 2 Nephi 10:24.
27. President Jeffrey R. Holland taught: “When a battered, weary swimmer tries valiantly to get back to shore, after having fought strong winds and rough waves which he should never have challenged in the first place, those of us who might have had better judgment, or perhaps just better luck, ought not to row out to his side, beat him with our oars, and shove his head back underwater. That’s not what boats were made for. But some of us do that to each other” (“A Robe, a Ring, and a Fatted Calf” [Brigham Young University devotional, Jan. 31, 1984], 5, speeches.byu.edu).
28. Russell M. Nelson, “Peacemakers Needed,” *Liahona*, May 2023, 100.
29. 3 Nephi 18:32.