

His Paths

Phil! My name is Phillip Redd. I live here in Eagle. There's pressure being the first speaker for this conference. One thing is certain, the conference can only get better from here! I do pray for the Spirit of the Lord to witness of the truth of what I will share today. I love God and rejoice in Christ, and I am grateful to be among you, my brothers and sisters in Christ!

Most of us have been told all our lives that there is only one path to God. Our membership in the LDS church, our one baptism and receiving the laying on of hands for the gift of the HG, receiving temple ordinances including ultimately being sealed in the temple would guarantee us celestial glory. Check the boxes and you've got it made. More than two years ago now I began to realize the scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon, teach something different about our path back to God. It's individual and no one else's path will look like ours.

As most of you here would agree, as we tread our individual paths, we need no intermediary other than Christ to bring us to our Father in heaven. Within the first 8 verses of the B of M we learn that Lehi was brought into the Father's presence. Lehi found his path diverging from what it had been, living in Jerusalem. He was open to another way; open to hearing the Lord's voice, and willing to heed it no matter what the cost. He heard the Lord's voice in the message of contemporary prophets and received more knowledge while praying and interceding for his people. The Lord personally instructed him to lead his family to the promised land. This was Lehi's path.

[Nephi, while prophesying of the Savior, describes a prophet who would come before him and cry in the wilderness, "prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make **his paths** straight." He expressed joy when Laman and Lemuel humbled themselves, and he hoped for them that they would "walk in the **paths of righteousness.**"

Much like Paul of the New Testament who went abroad among the various churches, Alma went to the city of Gideon to preach. He was glad that they did not have so much unbelief as did their brethren in Zarahemla, and trusted that they would not let pride, vanity, and idolatry prevent them from truly worshipping God. Nonetheless, he was led by the spirit to warn them saying,

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“Repent ye, and prepare the way of the Lord, and **walk in his paths**, which **are straight**; for behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth.” (Alma 7:9)

After he prophesies of Christ’s birth of Mary, and of his ministry and atonement, he teaches them they must repent and be baptized (likely again, as they were righteous and were likely organized as a church already) and enter into a new covenant that they might have eternal life. He rejoices again that they are not like their brethren in Zarahemla, and says, in Alma 7:19-20:

*“For I perceive that ye are in the **paths of righteousness** (he could tell they were individually living their lives according to God’s will); I perceive that ye are in the path which leads to the kingdom of God (They were, collectively, abiding in the path God has laid out for obtaining eternal life; His path requires certain ordinances enabling us to gain light and truth, line upon line); yea, I perceive that ye are making **his paths straight**.*

*I perceive that **it has been made known unto you, by the testimony of his word**, that he cannot walk in **crooked paths**; neither doth he vary from that which he hath said; neither hath he a shadow of turning from the right to the left, or from that which is right to that which is wrong; therefore, his course is one eternal round (They had knowledge of the true nature of God, likely because the Word Himself [Christ] had visited them).*

Alma teaches here how our paths must converge on the Lord’s path for us to find Him, to become His, to become saved and become what He is. These people were spiritually vastly different from their neighboring people of Ammonihah, who with some careful study, appear to be a religious people, albeit a people plagued with priestcraft and iniquity. They were *not* walking in His paths, knowledge of the truth had escaped them because of their unbelief and iniquity. They ultimately killed the believers among them, and were destroyed as was prophesied.

What would Alma say if he were to come among us? Are we living according to God’s will in our lives; are we in the paths of righteousness? Joseph Smith taught we must seek to know God; that “there can be no eternal life on any other principle.” (see WofJS and

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King Follett Discourse) We must seek the face of Christ and come to *know* Him. This isn't my topic and others will likely cover this later, so I will only say this:

Throughout the BoM the various writer prophets share their own personal journeys, or *paths*, in which they came to *know* the Lord. I've mentioned Lehi. Of course there's Nephi, Jacob, Alma. The brother of Jared is another. He was prepared for that moment and experience when the personage of Jesus Christ appeared to him, and he was redeemed. He absolutely made certain decisions along *his* path that led to him having this experience.

For example, he prayed that his friends' and family's language would not be confounded at the time of Babel. That led him to the Lord instructing him to lead his people away into the wilderness. They came to the sea and the B of J decided to pray again and he learned what type of vessel they should build to cross the great deep. Why build such a nonconventional vessel? The Lord, knowing it would require light, knew the B of J would seek to know how to solve this dilemma. *The Lord, knew and enlightened the B of J's mind, to build certain vessels, to develop a way to light the vessels, a way which would ultimately require faith and even the Lord's personal intervention, even a miracle to complete or perfect.* Furthermore, the B of J's motives were pure—he could not stand the thought of his people crossing the great deep in darkness. He indeed **passed the test**, having obtained charity and interceding for his people. When he did so, and saw the Lord (and See Ether 3:13), "...because ye have seen these things ye are redeemed from the fall." The Lord knew the B of J's path and guided him along it, to be in the Lords path to redemption.

How then do we make His paths "straight?" Think of a yardstick or ruler. We use one to make lines straight. This also has a connotation of exactness, correctness and precision. As different as our individual paths are, it is with exactness with which each of us must live in order to be redeemed, as was the B of J, and ultimately perfected. This is not exactness in obeying and living according to false tradition and a mosaic-type law. Nephi said it well.

3 Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ. Wherefore, I said unto you, feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.

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4 Wherefore, now after I have spoken these words, if ye cannot understand them it will be because ye ask not, neither do ye knock; wherefore, ye are not brought into the light, but must perish in the dark.

5 For behold, again I say unto you that if ye will enter in by the way, and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do.

6 Behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and there will be no more doctrine given until ***after he shall manifest himself unto you in the flesh***. And when he shall manifest himself unto you in the flesh, ***the things which he shall say unto you shall ye observe to do***.

2 Nephi 32:3-6

If we want to become as He is the Lord is anxious to teach us how. For each of us it will require different things, different experiences, different choices and mistakes. But it is up to us to obey with exactness what *His voice* tells us to do. The sons of Helaman went toward each battle with confidence in the Lord and not one was lost in battle because of their exactness in obedience to ***the right voice***. Alma 57:21 reads, “*Yea, and they did obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness; yea, and even according to their faith it was done unto them...*” They heard the voice of the Lord through His chosen servant, Helaman. They understood the need to walk in the Lord’s paths in order to defend their people.

The Lord’s paths are true. How many truths can there be? Joseph Smith taught this is in Lectures on Faith (lecture 3rd verse 22):

“And again, the idea that he is a God of truth and cannot lie, is equally as necessary to the exercise of faith in him, as the idea of his unchangeableness. For without the idea that he was a God of truth and could not lie, the confidence necessary to be placed in his word in order to the exercise of faith in him, could not exist. But having the idea that he is not man that he can lie, it gives power to the minds of men to exercise faith in him.”

(Lectures on Faith 3:22)

Light is light, darkness is not. “It is easy to convert an unchanging God into a changeable Being who has given His power unto men. We must be careful about believing the God who is the same today, yesterday, and forever, is now so whimsical that one day He asks

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one thing of you, and on the next something different. Why is there shifting sand beneath (our) feet? Ask, where might I go to find the rock upon which to stand so that the winds and the rains do not cause me to fall?" Excerpt From: Denver Snuffer. "Preserving the Restoration."

The scriptural definition of truth includes the following, from D&C 93:24-32, 36:

- “24 And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come;
- 25 And whatsoever is more or less than this is the spirit of that wicked one who was a liar from the beginning.
- 26 The Spirit of truth is of God. I am the Spirit of truth, and John bore record of me, saying: He (Christ) received a fulness of truth, yea, even of all truth;
- 27 And no man receiveth a fulness unless he keepeth his (Christ’s) commandments.
- 28 He (you and me) that keepeth his (Christ’s) commandments receiveth truth and light, until he (you or me) is glorified in truth and knoweth all things.
- 29 (Christ speaking now) Man was also in the beginning with God. **Intelligence, or the light of truth**, was not created or made, neither indeed can be.
- 30 **All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence.**
- 31 Behold, here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man; because that which was from the beginning is plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the light.
- 32 And every man whose spirit receiveth not the light is under condemnation.
- 36 The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth.”

So truth is in different dimensions other than space and time. It is the essence of intelligence, even of our existence in our various spheres. How then do we reconcile the “truth” we learned in previous years is no longer “true?” Certainly, what may seem like truth to me, may not be truth to you because we are all on different points of the circle; or put another way our spheres or levels of development are all distinct depending on our unbelief and the condition of our hearts. And we must consider, *“Just because something is true at one moment it does not mean it will remain true forever. Things*

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change because our decisions matter, what we do always matters.” Excerpt From: Denver Snuffer. “Preserving the Restoration.” The Lord sees our past, present and future choices.

A quick example is, for me the LDS Church **was** indeed true until a couple years ago, as far as my light and knowledge had progressed to that point. At least several and various confirmations I’d received from the Lord throughout my life gave me that assurance. If it hadn’t been true, I would not have stuck with it, in other words, would not have had certain choices nor made certain decisions in my life. Had I not made those decisions I would not be **where** I am **today**, knowing the Church **cannot now** be “true,” and knowing better how the Holy Ghost works and how to recognize the Lord’s voice.

Consider this part of a recent blog post, “An answer to prayer is often based on the question asked and the frame of reference in which the question is framed. Oftentimes we do not yet know enough to frame the right question.

God deals with each of us where we are at the moment we approach Him. He does not always tell us something we haven’t yet prepared our minds and hearts to receive. So when He gives an answer to a partial, incomplete, and unfocused inquiry, while the answer will be “true” it is an answer inside a context.”

But we must look both ahead and behind, as God does and gives us assurances if we seek, to make sure we are on the right path. We look forward with true faith, faith in Christ—in an unchangeable God, whom we can trust and have confidence in **to guide** us with *His* voice. We can look back with the Spirit of prophecy, or testimony of Christ, to see where our Lord **has guided** us thus far. If we look sideways, we only compare ourselves to each other, which has no effect or power to save. This is how we develop unbelief.

Untruths, or unbelief, are tools of the adversary, who only wants to deceive us. What better way than to try and convince us that something is true, that is **not** actually true? He interjects unbelief in us that prevents us from finding truth. He causes us to look to the right and sometimes to the left. “He or she is doing it this way, is that what I should do?” or “the way he or she did that cannot possibly be right!” We often hear, “that’s how tradition would have it be.” Or, we depend too much on a leader, on having a strongman. “O my people, they who lead thee cause thee to err and destroy the way of

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thy paths.” (2 Nephi 13:12) In this way we are darkened in our minds, so that we cannot gain light and truth, intelligence, or glory. Unbelief has many faces.

We shed unbelief by *taking off the scales* that blind us and *shaking off the chains* that “would bind us fast” to our traditions. (See 2 Nephi 9:45) We do this by repenting, turning completely to face God, then by asking, seeking and knocking, building upon Christ as our rock. These chains are an illusion of security and of captivity, depending on how you look at them. If you have a sense of security with your unbelief, you are unfortunately damned. If you have a sense of captivity regarding your unbelief, merely “shake them off” and you can be free—free to learn truth, free to follow the path Christ is trying to lead you along—free to allow Him to do His work to save you.

The Lord’s paths for us require certain ordinances enabling us to gain light and truth, line upon line. Remember, “in the ordinances, thereof (of the priesthood) the power of godliness is manifest.” (D&C 84:19) So if we desire to be godly, when God says we must do something His way in order to obtain it, there is no other option but to do it—His way. Christ clearly taught *His doctrine*, and that anything that is more or less than His doctrine, is not of him, but is of the adversary. Put another way,

“that which you hear is as the voice of one crying in the wilderness—in the wilderness, because you cannot see him—my voice, because my voice is Spirit; my Spirit is truth; truth abideth and hath no end; and if it be in you it shall abound.
67 And if your eye be *single* to my glory, your *whole bodies* shall be *filled with light*, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things.”
(D&C 88:66-67)

Remember the part in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*, when all the dwarves and Bilbo had climbed Lonely Mountain and reached the back porch looking for the hidden door so they could get inside? The runes on the map they had with them told them they had to, “stand by the gray stone when the thrush knocks, and the setting sun with the last light of Durin’s Day will shine upon the keyhole.” This had to happen precisely as the map instructed, in order for them to enter the mountain. This could not happen by any other way. If you know the story, when they learned this from Elrond the Elf King, they still had most of their journey ahead of them. It was fraught with great challenges and peril,

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but keeping their goal in mind they forged ahead, straying at times from and then finding their way back to the path that would lead them to their goal, and only just in time.

Thank you for indulging me while comparing the gospel of Tolkien to the Gospel of Christ, but I do think the example can be instructive.

Christ's words define what **the Father** requires, in other words, the faith and virtues we each must gain, what ordinances we must have, and how we are to come to **know Him**, to **be like** Him, so **He** may guide us along His paths, through the pass, avoiding the beast, to rest with the Fathers. He masterfully delivered His doctrine, in His Sermon on the Mount. In this sermon he taught what we must do to be blessed, or redeemed, to make a new covenant with the Father, to receive a new name, even Christ's name upon us and become His seed; His children. Christ gave this sermon to more than one group of people, and we have at least two accounts in scripture to learn from the only complete sermon he gave that we have record of.

In the first verses He taught His doctrine, that we must hear His messengers, repent and be baptized by proper authority, thus receiving the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost and a remission of sins.

Now I'll touch on a few of the beatitudes Christ taught:

3 Yea, blessed are the poor in spirit who come unto me, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Realize we lack the spirit, we're "poor" because we lack and we're aware of it. "Come unto me" means be baptized unto repentance and to receive the Holy Ghost—regain the spirit of which we were "poor." Christ told Nicodemus we must be born again to enter into the Kingdom of God.

4 And again, blessed are all they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

What do we mourn for? We may mourn with each other our losses, our sorrows, etc. In this way we may have Charity. We should also mourn our lack of knowledge and we

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should mourn our sinful state. If we mourn, we need to and *will* be comforted, first comforted by the Holy Ghost and receive that missing knowledge, filling us with joy. Then as we truly mourn our sinful state we can and will receive the second comforter, even Christ, who will immediately forgive us that we may endure His presence; the robes he places upon us are comforting; our nakedness (our shame and reproach) will be covered.

5 And blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

A teacher said, "God can only exalt the meek, because only the meek can be trusted with exaltation. Why is meekness required of a god, by a God? What would happen if God were not patient, not willing to suffer abuse and be rejected? What would happen if God were egotistical? What would happen if He did not return blessings for cursing? What would happen if God were not exactly what He taught in the Sermon on the Mount? What if God did not bless those who despitefully used and abused Him? What would happen if God did not submit Himself to fall into the hands of wicked men to be despised and rejected? What if He did not allow them to spit on Him, hang Him naked on a cross and ridicule Him by calling out, "if you really are what you claim, come down from the cross, then we will believe?" They killed Him and He let them." [DS. Preserving the Restoration.]

An inheritance is passed from parents to children. If we are meek and can be trusted with exaltation, trusted with an inheritance. Christ seals us His, and we become His children, or part of God's family and will inherit what is His, "even all that He hath."

6 And blessed are all they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost.

3 Nephi 12:6

If we will sacrifice what the Lord requires of us He will fulfill His promises to us. We can start by prayerful *fasting* from whatever He instruct us to give up (whether temporarily or permanently) in order to prove our devotion and to develop the faith necessary to *learn*, for is it not the Holy Ghost which brings all things to our remembrance? Isn't the sacrifice of all things required to develop saving faith? To be filled with the Holy Ghost is to be one with the mind or Spirit of God and Christ—to know what they know.

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I invite you to study the Savior's Sermon on the Mount, as I will not finish the rest of the verses. Examining each verse as well one may discover that each of these concepts has to do with Christ's perhaps greatest attribute **love**. In 3 Nephi 11:38, He defines his doctrine, *"And again I say unto you, ye must repent, and be baptized in my name, and become as a little child, or ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God."*

What do little children do but love? So also, we must love—love God and each of our fellowmen. "Make His paths straight."

So, why **"his paths" plural**? He knows what each of us needs individually. He provides each with unique circumstances that will teach us exactly what we need to know and when. We should understand our own individual path will be entirely different from our neighbor's path. For all of us here today, I believe Zion must be a checkpoint along our paths, with our paths converging again. Though timing is different for all of us, our converging here in this movement is exactly what Christ designed to happen.

Isaiah 2:2-3 reads, "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will **walk in his paths**: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

Again in Isaiah chapter 5:26 we read (including a few personal insights), "And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from **far** (a sign to Enoch's and Melchizedek's people), and will **hiss** (not any earthly communication but some other heavenly sign or signal) unto them from the **end of the earth** (that is the end of this mortal estate): and, behold, **they** (Enoch's and Melchizedek's people) shall come with speed swiftly." Someone wrote as well, "The ensign Isaiah prophesied refers to a zodiacal map, or to the constellations overhead. The ensign to be reared will tell those in Zion how to walk in the paths of God, through the heavens, back into God's presence. Zion will be a connection between heaven and earth, where those living will learn the ways of the God of Jacob. They will walk in His paths. Heaven and earth will be connected." [Excerpt from: Denver Snuffer.

"Preserving the Restoration."] This is why Father Abraham was so interested in learning of signs in the heavens, and why there those among us who have enlightened us to some

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degree about these important signs as well. We would do well to, and indeed we must seek learning of these signs and paths of God as did Abraham.

Someone paraphrased the prophet Joseph Smith as follows, “Joseph held up a ring and said, ‘There is no beginning and there is no end, it is one eternal round.’ I’m telling you, you’re only on part of the cycle *here*. But, you *are on part of this endless cycle, here.*”

God can see our past, present and future as we travel around the circle, or sphere. Simply, we need to make the path between us path **straight**. Like the different spokes of a wheel, our path from the circle, to God in the center, is our *own*. Thus “His paths” are our collective paths back to Him, and His efforts to help each of us find Him individually, if we are humble, with a broken heart and a contrite spirit. He has set out *certain requirements, ordinances, that must be kept exactly* and virtues obtained along our paths, to **fill** us with His light, glory, love, etc to obtain commonality. This is what it means to **make His paths straight** or we miss the mark and do not ultimately connect with Him, know Him or become as He is.

If you’ll indulge me again, as an illustration of an individual path, I will share only a little of my own with you today. My grandparents often invited us over to study the Book of Mormon. My GM once said was that at some point we would have to choose between following the Lord and following the prophet.

At 17, I finished reading the Book of Mormon one evening and I thought to pray to know of its truth. So I knelt and asked God if the book I had read was true. The thought came, “of course you know it’s true.”

I went to BYU for a year then went on a mission to Chile. From that experience I learned to be less selfish. I learned how much I needed Christ in my life. I continued at BYU, met my soul-mate and was sealed to her in the Salt Lake City temple. This was true for me then. It had to be, in that context in my life.

16 years and Six children later, I found myself going through the motions, as faithfully as possible, but I felt a void at church. I decided I needed to study the scriptures and words of Joseph Smith. Not a year or two later, my wife’s brother sat us down at a family

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reunion and told us the same thing my GM had once said, that is, someday we will need to choose between following the Lord or following the prophet.

After a year of studying the scriptures together as extended family and listening to various lectures, we were re-baptized for the remission of sins, unto the *Lord*, in living water and began taking the sacrament of the Lord's supper (with wine, yuck!). we had formed a fellowship among whom we could collect and disperse tithing to help the poor among us. On palm Sunday 2 years ago, my wife and I were excommunicated because we were actually following Christ and not the so named "prophet"—it was time we made that choice. We were required by the Lord to witness of Him and defend Him before the high counsel in our stake. This was the sacrifice He required of us, that our dear church membership was to be placed on the altar. What's interesting is we were suddenly *freed!* We could shake off those binding chains!

We were shunned by many who had called us their friends, but we have also been blessed through this to find ourselves associated with several other wonderful like-minded individuals in fellowship. I have tried to bless those who have persecuted me including my own family. Please though, let the Lord decide what is persecution for His name's sake. Let's not take His name in vain when we declare our own persecution for his name, if it is not His will. This leads to all kinds of religious mischief. Be humble, turn the other cheek in meekness. We must teach our children this as well.

Father sees each of my choices along my path up until now, and He sees my future choices. I believe He sees what choices I made in previous estates. Each experience and decision along my path, including the mistakes, have taught me.

(Jeremiah 29:12-14) 12 Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you.

13 And ye shall seek me, and find me, *when ye shall search for me with all your heart.*

14 And I will be found of you, saith the Lord: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the Lord; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.

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Jesus Christ seeks to gather me, to make me His, and has personally been aware of my choices. He continually sets in motion those circumstances that have given me certain choices, all of which have brought me to THIS POINT NOW on MY path. I MUST MAKE **MY PATH ONE WITH HIS**, “searching with all my heart” to find and know Him. I have assurances that I am making some progress. Someone in our fellowship said it well: “We all have a path to walk. Let’s hope it winds through Zion on our way to the Master.” And indeed it must wind through Zion!

You being here at this conference is no coincidence; it is designed as a check-point for each of you along your individual paths to meet and know the Lord. We should not be forcing our path on anyone else! We should, however, realize and teach that a true believer’s path will mimic the Savior’s, eventually doing everything He did, being like He was and is, loving as He loved, no matter how difficult. God has once again sent messengers to teach of His paths. Abraham chose a path to rise up out of an apostate family and nation. He came to know heaven’s ordinances and gained the knowledge needed to receive a covenant from God. May our paths eventually reach a commonality, making His paths straight. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.