

Default Setting

The Role of Habits
in Keeping Singles Single



Lance R Curtis

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Introduction – Wake Up!

“AWAKE, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion . . . Shake thyself from the dust; arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.”

-Isaiah 52:1-2

“Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.”

-Ephesians 5:14

“Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul.”

-2 Nephi 4:28

I once lived in a nice apartment with a dishwasher. I would place my dishes inside the dishwasher once I finished using them. When the dishwasher became full, I ran it. In this way I kept a clean kitchen with minimal effort.

But eventually life changed as it always does. I moved to a larger city with a considerably higher cost of living, which meant getting less space for the same money. That translated into no dishwasher in my new apartment.

Yet the habit I had in the old place remained. I still wanted to put my dirty dishes into a dishwasher. Only now I didn't have one. Dirty dishes piled up in and around the sink. Every so often I would need to wash my dishes by hand in order to clear the space to cook.

This experience with habit describes how all of us are biologically hardwired to live our lives. We're so used to living life a certain way we simply act from habit. We'll do that even when our habits no longer apply to our situation. We'll also act from habit even when doing so worsens our situation. We're all biologically hardwired to have habits.

In this regard, we're all the same. We all develop habits that help us navigate the terrain of our lives. And those habits remain with us even when that terrain changes to make the old habits useless or painful.

In this sense, many go through life asleep. Steeped in habitual ways of thinking, most don't know what to do to improve their lives. Or they think they know what to do but don't know how to do it. Because all of us are biologically hardwired to operate out of habit, all of us find ourselves in such moments sooner or later.

When such moments come to you, lacking an awareness of your

habits and the role they've played in bringing you to where you find yourself will only compound your difficulty. You're so busy performing your habits that you can't step outside yourself and see yourself more objectively. Many of you in that situation cannot see the way out. Some of you even believe there is no way out.

That's why the first step towards meaningful change in your life is to wake up. To position yourself for positive change, you must first understand the role of habits in your life and their relationship to your thinking. In addition, you need to understand how culture within both the Church and Western society has influenced the creation of your habits.

Unless you consciously choose to do otherwise, you're designed to act according to your default setting. What is your default setting? In the absence of any conscious choice on your part, you're biologically hardwired to revert by default to whatever habit you have for your situation. Your default setting is to execute the instructions encoded in your habits, regardless of the outcome those instructions bring you. In this way, many people are their own worst obstacles to having the life they want. And they don't even know it.

What follows is especially intended for LDS singles who are their own worst obstacle and don't even know it. Many LDS singles remain single needlessly because they're the unwitting victims of their own habits. Their lives won't change until they change. They won't change themselves until they know what changes to make and how to do it. And they won't know that completely without first knowing how they're biologically designed to function.

That said, the principles underlying this book apply to anyone in any situation looking to live a better life. Anyone can leverage these principles to improve any life. No matter who you are, it's easier to navigate the terrain of life when you understand how you're designed to do it.

When you understand your habits and their role in how you're designed to function, you can live a better life by intention. You can also treasure anew the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel really does contain the cure for all of the ills in life. With your proper choices, your habits can automatically bring you your best life.

It all starts by knowing how you're biologically hardwired so you can change how you think. When you change your thinking, you'll change your life.

Are you ready to get started? Great! Then let's dive in!

Chapter 1

Your Biological Hardwiring

“O that ye would awake; awake from a deep sleep, yea, even from the sleep of hell, and shake off the awful chains by which ye are bound, which are the chains which bind the children of men, that they are carried away captive down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe.”

-2 Nephi 1:13

If you want different results in life, you need to do different things. Most people would probably say they agree with that statement. Yet their actions would say they *don't* agree with that statement. Most people don't think to question why they do what they do. Many don't even question *what* they do let alone *why*. They simply play out whatever habit they have.

The result is a life of insanity. *Insanity* has been popularly defined as doing the same things over and over again while expecting a different result. And that sort of life, often filled with disillusionment and frustration, is mediocre at best.

Many LDS singles live lives of insanity. They continue doing the things active LDS singles do, all the while feeling like they aren't really getting anywhere. In that respect, many LDS singles can relate to the hamster running inside its wheel at the local pet store. They keep doing and doing but never progressing. The longer they stay that way, the more they feel life is passing them by. The train has left, and they're still standing at the station.

They know their life is insane. They know they need to do something to change their situation. They're just not exactly certain what that something is.

For me, insanity isn't just *doing* the same things again and again and expecting a different result. It's also *thinking* the same way again and again and expecting a different result. How we think is extremely fundamental to the lasting success many of us seek. To neglect that truth is to continue a life of insanity.

We get to the root of our problems only when we dig deep enough. For many, that means understanding much more than *what* we choose to do. It means understanding *why* we choose as we do. We need to understand how we're designed to function.

Years ago, I worked professionally as an engineer. When analyzing a failure, one of my first tasks was always to understand how the equipment involved worked. It's difficult to improve upon a design or

repair something faulty without first understanding how it was intended to function and how the various pieces fit and work together.

In like manner, how can you expect to improve yourself in any situation if you don't understand how you were designed to operate — how your various pieces of biological hardwiring fit and work together?

Reformat and reboot

Most people have habits holding them back from living a more fulfilling life. It's easy to acknowledge your habits may be holding you back. But you won't understand how they're doing that unless you understand how habits work in you.

In this regard, an analogy proves enlightening. Most of us today would find it hard to imagine life without modern computer technology and everything that comes with it. Given our current tethers to that technology, suppose for a moment that your desktop or laptop computer freezes up. What would you do? Most people would simply restart the machine. But what if that doesn't work?

You may have a virus. If detected early enough, a virus can be easily managed. Remove the offending file and restart the machine. However, if the virus has corrupted the operating system, the solution requires more severity. You must reformat the hard drive and then reboot. Reformatting the hard drive replaces *everything*. All your data is erased and then replaced with fresh code as though the machine had just left the factory floor.

Many of us need to reformat and reboot ourselves. It's difficult to love your life when your life operating system overflows with an abundance of bad code. Bad code can include erroneous perceptions, faulty beliefs, influences based upon false ideas, defunct ways of thinking, and failed paradigms. If the operating system for your life is corrupted, how can you expect your life to be anything but frozen? How could you not be frustrated and depressed?

If this describes you, take heart. You really can make changes that bring a fulness of joy to your life. You start by understanding your operating system and then replacing bad code with better code. As you read this book, think about what needs replacing in your life operating system. Resolve to leave *no* bad code uncorrected.

In encouraging you thus, I'm *not* suggesting in any way that you ignore your covenants. The whole point of reformatting is to replace bad code with better code. The covenants we make at baptism and within the temple are anything but bad code; they're among the best

code we could possibly have.

In 1833, the Lord supported the idea of reformatting ourselves when He revealed to the Prophet Joseph,

And I give unto you a commandment, that ye shall forsake all evil and cleave unto all good, that ye shall live by every word which proceedeth forth out of the mouth of God. (D&C 98:11)

That's exactly what reformatting is, taking out all the bad and replacing it only with good. And that bad is not just in *what* we think, say, and do. It's also in *how* we think and interact with the world around us.

The writer Mark Twain once wrote, "You can't depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus" (*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Oxford World Classics, p.346). In other words, you can't see the whole problem without questioning your assumptions. You must put away any pride and consider that what you have always thought was true may in fact be false. Without questioning your assumptions, you simply won't see the whole problem you need to solve. In fact, you may not see any of it.

You need to accept this need to question your assumptions before you proceed any farther. If you don't, you'll very likely reject the solutions you're seeking simply because you won't recognize them as solutions. Without accepting the solutions you need, you won't be changed. And if you aren't changed, then neither will *your life* be changed.

*OK, hold up here, I can hear some of you thinking. This is not what I really need. I've been keeping the standards and all that good stuff. What I really need to know is how to get married! That's the **real** problem I need to solve.*

You know, that's exactly how I myself thought for many years. And what did it get me? Did thinking that way get me any closer to my goal of eternal marriage? No.

Actually, make that a big, fat **NO!**

And to add insult to injury, those years are now wasted. All that time, I pined after something that always seemed out of reach. Not only did I get no closer to my righteous goal, I don't have much of anything else to show for those years of my life.

That's because I couldn't see the biggest part of my problem. The biggest part of my problem was **not** that I was single (although at the time I sincerely believed it was). The biggest part of my problem was that habits of old, defunct ways of thinking blinded me from seeing the real problem.

I had to do the real and deep digging into myself to examine how I had been seeing the world before I could correct what was in error. I had to discover who I really was. Only then could I identify what was consistent with that identity and what was not. Only then, and not before, was I able to see more clearly what the *real* problem was. Only then could I find the solution I really needed rather than the one I simply wanted.

That solution will take time to implement. But the train I'm on now will more likely get me to my destination. And I enjoy a much more pleasant journey in the meantime!

Many LDS singles are unhappy, even depressed. After years of trying to do what's right, they find themselves frustrated and without success. Yet they continue playing out their habits which have brought them that frustration rather than make the conscious choice to question their assumptions and begin the process of seeing what's really wrong.

Without that willingness to understand their operating system and replace bad code with better code, they'll never see that any negative emotions will simply never make them attractive to the people that interest them. If anything, negative emotions *repel* interesting people away from them, because no one wants to be surrounded with negative emotion. Everyone has enough of their own problems that they won't naturally be interested in helping others solve theirs just because they have them.

Many LDS singles, however, are so engrossed with their situation they can't see any of that. They're so steeped in their depression they feel no hope of their lives ever improving. They don't see the way out, often believing there is no way out.

If you can't see the way out, it's not because there's no way out. There *is* a way out. What does it then mean if you can't see the way out when there is a way out? Something prevents you from seeing what's really there. And that obstruction is the way you think.

There is always hope because there is always Christ. If you don't see a way out of your despair, you need to disconnect from erroneous ideas and reconnect with truthful ones. You need to learn to think in new and different ways. In essence, you need to reformat and reboot yourself.

So let's get started. Remember, leave no bad code uncorrected.

The thought-reality process map

In order to reformat and reboot yourself most effectively, you need to understand how you were designed to operate. Without

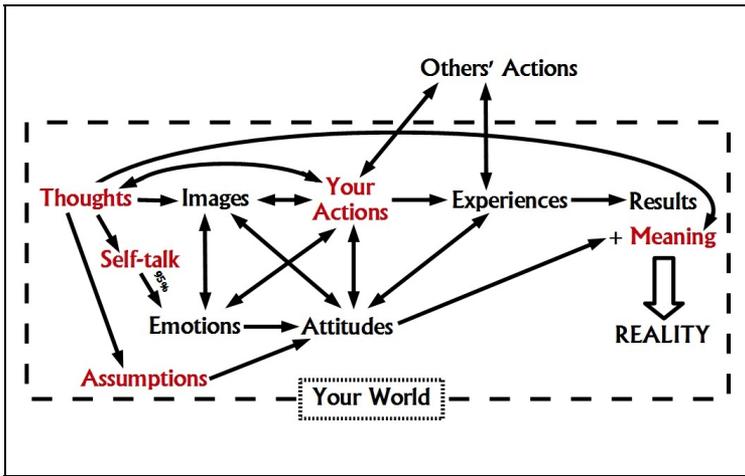


Figure 1 The thought-reality process map

understanding that process, you aren't very likely to get to the root of your problem. In fact, you'll very likely be shooting in the dark.

A useful engineering tool to aid in that effort is the process map. A process map is simply a diagram showing how the different elements of a process are interconnected. Engineers use this tool to identify inefficiencies as well as opportunities to simplify. But anyone can use this tool to improve their understanding of any given process.

To help you understand how you were designed to operate, I made a process map. Figure 1 shows a high-level view of your operational design. I call it the thought-reality process map because it shows how your thoughts lead to the reality you experience in life.

All elements inside the dashed line bounding your world belong to you. *Your Actions* appears specified as yours in order to distinguish it from the actions of others. *Others' Actions* appears on the process map to help those of you who think that other people have more control over your life than you do, which isn't true at all.

Inside Your World, you don't have direct control over the elements in black. You can influence these items, but you don't directly control them. However, you do have direct control over the elements in red. You choose what you think. You choose what you tell yourself (self-talk) and what you do. You choose your assumptions. And you choose the meaning you ascribe to your results.

Of course, whether you exercise that control or abdicate it is a separate question. *But the process shown in the thought-reality process map will always operate regardless of what you choose.* That's because this is how

you as a human being are biologically hardwired.

Note that most of the elements on the map have arrows which point in and out. For *Thoughts*, all arrows point out except for one. That one arrow pointing in comes from *Your Actions*. This means you have ultimate control over your thinking, which you can change with your actions. But you either thought about what you did before you did it or thought about the habit your actions are playing before you created it. So the arrow here goes both ways.

As shown on the far right side of the process map, you create the reality of your world by attaching meaning to your results. For *REALITY*, only one arrow appears, and it points in. Thus, the process starts with your thoughts (where most arrows point out) and ends with your reality (where its one and only arrow points in).

Your thoughts have multiple paths on their journey to your reality. In actual operation, the process is often cyclical, since most of the elements on the left side of the map feed into each other. But eventually, the path taken goes through *Experiences* and *Meaning*, finding ending in *REALITY*. Let's take a look at the role of habits along some of the more commonly taken paths.

You are hardwired *not* to think

Thoughts lead to images. Images are both visualizations in your mind and perceptions of your world. When you encounter images, you are designed to respond with a habit. *When you act out of habit, you do things without thinking about them.*

That actually is the main role of habits. They free you from having to think about every little thing you do every second. Habits also automate the way you interact with your world. And it turns out that's a very good thing. Why would that be good? Because, believe it or not, your brain is designed to think as little as possible.

I know that sounds strange to some of you, especially after seeing the prominent role that thoughts play in the thought-reality process map. But we all function more efficiently if we can do things without having to think about them. You see, *that's the way we're designed to operate.*

For example, suppose you had to think about every breath in order to breathe. You'd spend all of your time focusing on getting oxygen into your lungs. While you're likely as big a believer in breathing as I am, it wouldn't leave you time for anything else. The moment you focus on something else is the moment you stop focusing on your breathing. And

if you have to think about breathing in order to do it, you'll die if you aren't thinking about it all the time!

Now, if you had something to manage that for you so you could breathe without having to think about it, then you'd have lots of time to do whatever else. Enter the habit. With a habit to run your breathing and other essential processes, you can divert your mind elsewhere.

The problem comes when your habits promote less effective living. Or sometimes the very habits themselves are based on less effective ideas. These "secret instructions" will then corrupt your operating system, leading to a less effective life.

Such corruption will be widespread, since habits affect so much of the thought-reality process. You're designed to respond to your images with habitual actions. Your self-talk — the messages you say and think to yourself — is often habitual. Many of your attitudes are often habitual. Your assumptions are often habitual. In addition, many people have the habit of not examining their assumptions.

Because all these elements are often habitual, so too are the elements interconnected with them. When your thoughts, assumptions, self-talk, and attitudes are all habitual, you will feel the same emotions habitually. You often perform the same actions out of habit. This will lead you to the same types of experiences, which give you the same results. And when you connect those same results to the same meaning (the assignment of which is often also habitual), you get the same reality!

For anyone looking for a new reality in life, the thought-reality process map presents a clear and effective solution. To have a different reality, you must have different thinking. Do you see now why you must reformat and reboot yourself?

So let's get to work! It's time to do a Dorothy — pull back the curtain and take a look at the wizard. For our purposes, the "wizard" is your collection of habits you've adopted over the course of your life.

You always follow instructions

Habits are default sets of instructions that prescribe what you will do in a given situation. Those instructions could be what to think or what to say or what to do. Most often they are a combination of all three.

A drive to and from work along the same route provides a good example of habit. When you drive along the same route, the habit takes over. You operate the car fluidly like a grand master who need not

think about the performance to execute it flawlessly. Generally, if there are no surprises, you can coast along until you reach your destination.

We all began to form habits as children. When you were a child, you observed how others would act. You also were sensitive to how others interacted with you, particularly your parents. All these experiences taught you how to respond or act in a similar situation. This process continued until you were about ten years old.

Are your habits set in stone? Of course not. But you may need to exert some extra effort to change them, especially if you've had them for some time. That's because the human brain is not designed to think.

If you still don't believe me, then recall a time when you had to think a long time. Did you feel "brain dead" or get a headache? Of course you did. Why was that? You were forcing your brain to do something that it wasn't designed to do. That's why it hurts!

And that is why you have habits by design. That way, you don't have to think about how you'll respond every time a response is needed. You just follow the instructions. And as a special bonus, you avoid having to pop a couple of pills every day for your pain.

The phrase *old habits die hard* has survived for so long precisely because old habits *do* die hard. Your brain is hardwired not to think but to follow a set of previously assembled instructions. This is particularly true for situations which you perceive to be ordinary or routine.

In fact, when it comes to your habits, you *always* follow instructions. You rebels and contrarians out there may deny that. But it's nonetheless true. Unless you provide new instructions by making a conscious choice, you will *always* choose the default. And the default is to follow the instructions in your habits. That's how you were designed to function.

Stop living on autopilot

Because you're designed to follow the instructions in your habits, it doesn't matter whether your habit is based on a true idea or not. Perhaps your habits no longer match the situation in which you formed them. Or maybe executing them causes you inconvenience or even pain. None of that matters. All that matters is that the instructions are yours.

Let me say that again. *When it comes to habit, you follow instructions solely because they are yours.*

Take a moment to think about what that statement really means. The ramifications are far-reaching and highly significant. Habits do not depend on the results they generate. They depend solely on ownership.

It doesn't matter if you end up tripping over your own feet again and again. Remember my experience with the dishwasher? That experience exemplifies that *habits continue with you even though they may be ineffective or irrelevant*.

Unless replaced with a conscious choice or another habit, you'll simply follow along with whatever your habits tell you to do. You'll keep on keeping on. This is the principle of inertia at work.

Scientists and engineers are familiar with the concept of inertia. Sir Isaac Newton described inertia in his first law of motion: An object at rest tends to remain at rest, and an object in motion tends to remain in motion, unless acted upon by some outside force. Inertia is the tendency to keep on keeping on.

But inertia operates in more than the world of inanimate objects. It also works in the world of human behavior. And in the world of human behavior, *inertia is the default response*. That's why the best predictor of what you will do five minutes from now is what you're doing right now.

Think about it. (Yes, I know. I just got done explaining how your brain is designed not to think, and now I'm telling you to think about something. The irony hasn't escaped me, but I think — there I go again — you know what I mean.) If you're reading right now, then chances are pretty good you'll be reading five minutes from now. If you're driving right now (which you really shouldn't be if you're trying to read), then chances are pretty good you'll be driving five minutes from now.

And so it goes for most of what you do. Of course, you'll switch activities throughout the day. The point is most people tend to fill their day with tasks that take longer than two minutes to complete. Unless some outside force, like a conscious choice to do something different, acts upon you, you'll tend to keep on with whatever you're doing. This tendency to keep on keeping on is inertia.

Inertia applies not only to *what* you do in your life but also *how* you live it. For example, when you need groceries, do you shop every time at the same store? With so many places to buy groceries, why do you keep going back to the same store? And do you regularly purchase not only the same types of items but also the same brands?

If you travel between where you live and where you work, do you take the same route each time? When you go to church, do you sit in the same seat? I could keep on keeping on, but I think you get the point. Without any external force pushing some sort of change, your tendency is to repeat what you've always done before. This tendency to keep everything the same, to have a habit, is inertia. And inertia is *always*

your default response.

Because your default response is inertia, you will follow the instructions in your habits *regardless of how good or bad the results from what you're doing may be*. Habits don't depend on results; they depend only on ownership. For this reason many people experience failure habitually. Unaware of how they're designed to operate, they live life simply out of habits which lead them to fail over and over again. Does that description bring anyone you know to mind?

Thankfully, God has given everyone agency. You may be biologically hardwired to have a habit, but you can choose for yourself what that habit will be. Nevertheless, most people choose to be "sheeple." They choose to live like sheep by surrendering to their habits. And they have the habit not to examine their habits.

Without steady re-examination and re-evaluation, habits will carry you along a life lived on autopilot. Your course has been set, and the autopilot (powered by inertia) is engaged. Off you go on a journey, its details easily forgotten in the distractions of the moment.

If this describes you, then here's some great free advice: Stop living on autopilot! Of course, this is easier said than done. Yet a life fully lived requires manual control. To stop living on autopilot, you have to make conscious choices about what you think, say, and do.

Furthermore, you can't just decide once and be done with it. You're hardwired not to think, so in the absence of conscious choice, you'll automatically revert back to the default response of following a habit. Thus, you must constantly re-examine yourself in order to go where you truly intend to go.

And the default response is *always* inertia. You'll continue doing what you've always done because that's how you're hardwired. In fact, so powerful is the tide of inertia that *you will continue doing what you've always done even when the results make you very uncomfortable*.

For example, some of my divorced LDS friends have shared with me their feelings about attending the temple. When they were married, they would attend the temple with their spouses. These trips often occurred with other married couples from their ward. After a session, the couples would typically talk reverently while enjoying the celestial room.

All that changed after their divorce. My friends began feeling isolated while sitting in the celestial room. Without their spouses, they painfully felt they were missing something their married friends enjoyed as they conversed with their spouses.

It doesn't matter that the endowment represents the journey to

individual salvation. My divorced friends continued to see the endowment as they've always seen it, as a social event *for couples*. That perspective, grounded in their assumptions about the purpose of their temple attendance, now hurt them as singles.

The powerful tide of inertia continued to influence them to keep on keeping on. It didn't matter their lives were now very different. Nor did it matter their old way of seeing that activity made them uncomfortable!

Both divorced and widowed sisters have confided to me feelings of rejection and abandonment. Before they became single, ward members invited them to dinners and other social events. But once they became single, suddenly the invitations were not arriving as they once had been.

To be fair, their married friends likely thought inviting them to play "the third wheel" would not be very sensitive. Whether or not they were right to think that, the power of inertia influenced these now single adults to expect what they had always expected. When their expectations remained unfulfilled, pain resulted.

Habits explain not only the pain these singles experienced but also the complete absence of support these singles received from their ward leadership. Leaders operate by habit too! Just as my single friends need to reassess the meaning they ascribe to temple attendance, their leaders need to broaden their sphere of service to include the singles in their midst. Unfortunately, the combination of the family-centered culture of the Church and inertia results in a focus mainly on meeting the needs of those with families.

That all-too common focus among leadership holds some real irony. The family is under such attack we need everyone to defend that institution. With singles comprising a third of Church membership, those who (habitually) overlook the singles ignore a significant proportion of the potential defenses.

However, habits don't depend on results. They operate simply because they're owned. Left unchecked, inertia carries many — whether single or married — through a life of increasing unfulfillment. If you keep on with faulty ways of thinking, you'll continue to make efforts which don't produce the results you desire. And inertia will influence you to continue to experience failure time after time after time.

Most never stop to question what they're really doing. Because desired results don't materialize, they know something's wrong. But they never really question the thinking behind their actions. Inertia influences them to keep on keeping on without questioning — and therefore without answers.

You can see the power of inertia affecting LDS singles in many ways.

For example, unless caring members of the Relief Society shepherd them in, sisters who transition from Young Women can feel out of place. These young sisters once were close to other group members in both age and life status. Now they find themselves in a more diverse group.

Singles of both genders face a similar transition when leaving the YSA grouping. Thinking as they did while YSAs no longer matches the new SA landscape. This mismatch often creates difficulty in their new reality. And the Midsingles program doesn't really solve that problem. Most midsingles think as they did as YSAs, leaving them with the same reality they had as YSAs.

Divorced or widowed singles of any age want to continue living most aspects of life as they did with their spouse. They too can find difficulty in their new reality. Those who decide to return to dating can find added difficulty. Their natural response is the default response, which is to go back to the dating habits they had before they were married. Thus, anything unresolved before marriage — any difficulty, any awkwardness, any perception of inadequacy — presents itself anew. These singles unknowingly leave themselves open to making the same mistakes they made before.

In all of these situations and countless more, inertia encourages you to carry the habitual ways you think and see yourself with you. You'll do this even when those perceptions and identities do not match the new reality. This is how you're hardwired to operate.

Living life on autopilot means continuing to think the same way without thinking about what you're doing. That may be fine — until you meet something outside what those ways of thinking lead you to believe about your world. Then you'll get a real kick in the pants, and your life will feel really jolted.

If you want to decrease the turbulence in your travel, ask any good pilot what to do. What's their advice for confronting turbulence? You need to switch off the autopilot and slow down. You need to fly with manual control. In life, that means making conscious choices about what you think, say, and do.

I said this before, but it bears repeating. Unless you make conscious choices, inertia *will* be your default response. You'll play out whatever habit you have simply because you have it. That's what you're biologically hardwired to do.

Have you tried the same methods and approaches only to encounter failure after failure? Do you end in so much frustration you want to give up entirely? If so, you're living life on autopilot. You're thinking the same way over and over, doing the same things over and over, and

getting the same results over and over. And all without even really thinking about what you're doing because you're living life on autopilot.

You won't stop living on autopilot until you re-examine yourself and the way you think. You need to reformat and reboot yourself with new and different ways of thinking. Then you need to make conscious choices about what you think, say, and do.

Take a lesson from a Jedi

Making conscious choices can free you from the slavery of inertia and a life lived on autopilot. Yet you need to make the right types of conscious choices to move in the right direction. The thought-reality process map can become extremely useful here.

In Episode 1 of the Star Wars movie series, Jedi master Qui-Gon Jin brings young Anakin Skywalker before the Jedi Council. The council refuses Qui-Gon's request to train Anakin. Instead they insist that Qui-Gon escort Queen Amidala to her home planet of Naboo. Young Anakin comes with them.

Before they board the spacecraft, Qui-Gon kneels in order to be at eye level with Anakin. He tells Anakin that the Jedi Council has forbidden him to train him and so he should watch him closely. "Always remember," he then says, "your focus determines your reality" (*Star Wars Episode 1: The Phantom Menace*, 1:35:31). That's some really great advice for all of us, even if you aren't an aspiring Jedi knight.

One sacrament meeting in a former ward, I was sitting in a pew against one of the walls of the chapel. Normally I had the pew to myself. But this particular day a young couple with their two rambunctious and very obnoxious boys sat between me and the aisle.

As the Aaronic Priesthood passed the sacrament, I tried to reflect upon the Savior and my own efforts at discipleship. When the tray reached our pew, the father of the small family made sure his family had received the sacrament. He then passed the tray back to the Aaronic Priesthood holder.

At first I was incredulous I'd been denied the sacrament. Never have I ever imagined that happening to me. I thought to myself, Doesn't he know I'm here?

I then observed how much effort he needed to keep one of his sons only somewhat settled. His wife was just as exasperated with the other one. In that moment, though I sat not two feet from him, I understood I was outside his world.

It wasn't because he didn't care. It wasn't because he was married

and I was single. It was because so much of his focus was upon his son that he couldn't see outside his own bubble. Someone sitting not two feet away was outside of his world. His focus had determined his reality.

It turned out he wasn't *completely* oblivious. He recognized the error and later apologized profusely for it. I couldn't help but sense the incredible guilt he felt, but it was easy to forgive him. As rambunctious a child as he had, I don't blame him at all. Things would have likely resulted the same had it been anyone else with that kid. However, being denied the sacrament hasn't been as easy to forget.

Here's another example much closer to home for many singles. At one point in my life I became so focused on the eternal companion I didn't have I couldn't see anything else. And not seeing anything else, I couldn't feel anything but depressed. It didn't matter many good and great blessings surrounded me. I didn't see them, much like that fellow ward member didn't see me. My focus on the one blessing I didn't have created a reality of dissatisfaction.

LDS singles attending general membership wards can sometimes feel ignored by the married people around them. But some reflection on Jedi teaching can inspire some understanding and patience. Married people tend to do what *all* people do. They craft their lives around what is immediately in front of them. Who do you think that is for most married people with families in general membership wards? Of course, it's people like them.

LDS singles often feel forgotten, forsaken, and lost in a sea of people living lives they don't live. But no one need feel that way. If your ward's reality doesn't include you, you're probably outside of its focus. To be part of your ward's reality, get inside its focus. Be an active member of your ward. Get in the face of others in a positive way. Make meaningful contributions into the lives of other ward members.

You don't need a calling to make that happen. You need only to recognize a need and then work to fill it. With that focus on what you do have and can do, your reality will be much more enjoyable.

So what's *your* reality? Do you like your reality? If not, ask yourself this question: What's your focus? Your focus determines your reality, so to change your reality you must change your focus. We all receive the reality aligned with whatever focus we choose.

*Oh, come on, I can hear some of you saying. What's with the psychobabble here? **The problem is I'm not married!** That's not going to happen until someone accepts me and goes with me to the temple. Changing the way I think isn't going to produce my companion. I can change the way I think all day and still be single. Besides, what's so wrong with being focused on achieving my*

righteous goals?

For many years I had the feelings you express. Coddling them didn't get me anywhere I wanted to be. And neither will it for you.

Those frustrating years of my life might have been different had I understood what frustration really was — a signal to stop, a sign you're going about something the wrong way. As it was, I felt frustrated because how I thought led me to a dead end. I needed a different way of thinking that could show me a path for moving forward, and so do you.

The thought-reality process map clearly shows this. By embracing negative thinking about myself and my potential, I incorrectly assumed I couldn't achieve my desires. That led me to adopt poor attitudes which encouraged actions in myself that influenced others to behave undesirably towards me, providing results I didn't want.

Those poor attitudes also made me feel negatively about myself. These negative emotions were intensified by negative self-talk promoted by the negative thinking I had originally embraced. And because I embraced the negative thinking out of unquestioned habit, inertia carried me along a life lived on autopilot. I kept getting the same results over and over again — results I didn't want.

You're right that changing the way you think isn't going to make your companion magically appear. But I'm not talking about a magic lamp with a genie inside. And yet at the same time I am. When I was incredibly focused on what I didn't have, that way of thinking wasn't making me a happy me. And an unhappy me was an unattractive me.

Changing the way I thought didn't make me instantly *married*. My physical circumstances in that moment did not change; I was still just as single as I was before. But (and this is the key point) changing the way I thought did make me instantly more *marriageable* because it helped me become a more attractive me.

The thought-reality process map explains how that happened. Changing the way I thought changed how I perceived my physical circumstances. My images and my assumptions changed. And all those changes made me a much happier me because those changes influenced my attitudes and emotions. I felt much better about myself and my future prospects.

That more hopeful me translated into a happier, much more attractive me. Why? Because most people don't want to spend ten minutes let alone eternity with someone who isn't hopeful and happy. Being that happier me means that someone will more likely want to share my life with me, whether or not she wears a belly dancer costume.

If all anyone sees in their life is a hopeless collection of negative emotion, then how can their reality be anything different? And who would want to share that reality? Who really wants darkness in their life? There is no greatness or glory in darkness. So it isn't psycho-babble at all to speak the truth: Your focus determines your reality.

Take another look at the thought-reality process map. You choose your thoughts. You choose your assumptions. You choose the messages you feed yourself through self-talk. You choose the thoughts and actions that determine your images.

All of these elements influence how you feel and what you do, which ultimately lead to the results you get in life. When you couple those results with meaning (which, by the way, you choose), you get the reality of your world. So the thoughts upon which you choose to focus eventually lead to your reality. Put more succinctly, your focus determines your reality.

I understand others make choices outside your control. The thought-reality process map recognizes this truth. That's why *Others' Actions* lie outside the dotted line. Changing the way you think won't change the choices of others from the past or in the future.

But let's get real here. You don't really want to force others to choose you. Forcing everyone to make a predetermined choice was Satan's plan, remember? (Oh, yeah, there's that veil of forgetfulness you passed through to get here, so maybe you don't remember.)

You can't change how others choose. You can, however, change how you choose. How and what you choose to think, say, and do *can* influence others in their choices. God gave you a wonderful gift when He gave you agency. It may surprise you just how much you really *do* control.

But first you need to reformat and reboot yourself. You've started that process by understanding the role habits play in your life. Now you need to examine the various influences on your habits. And that brings us to the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Influences on Your Habits

“For so great had been the spreading of this wicked and secret society that it had corrupted the hearts of all the people ...”

-Ether 9:6

In the previous chapter we discussed the role your habits play in your decisions. We’re all alike in that we’re all biologically hardwired to follow the instructions encoded in habits. Yet we’re also all different; no two of us have exactly the same set of habits.

That begs the question: How exactly did you get your particular combination of habits? In this chapter, we’ll answer that question in part by examining some of the influences that commonly affect the habits of LDS singles. I emphasize the word *some*. We’re all alike and yet all so very different that no human being (myself included) can tell you absolutely everything you need to change about yourself.

However, there is someone who knows you and *can* tell you absolutely everything — the Holy Ghost. As you read about the major influences detailed in this chapter, open yourself to the whisperings of the Spirit. At least some of your habits have influences not mentioned in this chapter. In terms of the thought-reality process map, these influences primarily operate through your assumptions. The Spirit can show you which of your assumptions need attention.

We discussed the need for all singles to reformat and reboot themselves. As you act on that resolve to change, inertia will oppose you. The inclination to keep on keeping on is strong by design. If you think the best way forward is to fight that inclination, think again. You’re designed to keep on keeping on. That means the more productive approach is to leverage the way you’re designed to your advantage.

You can do this by replacing your less effective habits with more effective ones. Then you can just work as you were designed to work. Your default response is always to follow your habit, but now you will follow your reformatted habit which serves to your advantage.

Again, these influences operate primarily through your assumptions. Most of us simply adopt the assumptions we’re given. But you don’t have to do that. You can choose your assumptions. Seek to recognize how the major influences we’ll discuss in this chapter have affected your assumptions. Remember, leave no bad code behind.

You gotta have “it” to be accepted

One of the most insidious aspects of Western culture is the adoration of people supposedly born with unique talent. We marvel at people with superior abilities, whatever that talent may be. Now don't get me wrong. It's okay to recognize talent where it exists and congratulate those who have it. You can and should dream to have more talent than you currently possess.

The problem comes when you consider those at the top to have been born with something the rest of us (and especially you) can't ever have. This idea is the entity theory. You're either born with the talent to thrive — it's part of the entity that makes you you — or you aren't. And if you aren't, well, too bad for you.

More recently psychologists have called this thinking the fixed mindset. Having a fixed mindset means you believe who we are and what talents we have are set at birth. The fixed mindset assumes that no matter how much effort you make, there are simply some things you'll never do well.

We all think like this more often than we might realize. Ever heard someone say “I'm just not good at math” or “I'm not a math person”? Maybe you even think that about yourself. And yet people learn math all the time. What sense does it make to say that anyone is not “good at math” when people learn it every day?

Obviously, those who changed first believed they could change. This belief in change represents a growth mindset, the alternative to the fixed mindset. Those with a growth mindset believe the brain is not rigid but flexible; with the proper application of effort anyone can learn anything. We may be born with certain talents which require us to work less in some areas and therefore more in other areas, but we can all do that work. We can all make effort to improve. We can all change.

Yet the fixed mindset persists in our culture. We hear people say not only that they aren't math people but also that they're “big-boned” and therefore can't really lose weight. We hear them say they're too old or too poor or too whatever to pursue their dreams. And often people embrace negative self-talk (saying, for example, what an idiot they are whenever do they do something stupid). Each of these statements reflect the fixed mindset.

In some respects, recognizing the fixed mindset in many of our habitual communications and thinking shouldn't surprise anyone. We've had that mentality drilled into our heads since childhood. For those of us living in the Western world, the fixed mindset is one of our

largest assumptions, which is partly why it's so insidious.

From kindergarten to high school, we've all been scored and compared with other students. This process continued through college and into the world of work. Performance reviews and compensation packages simply replaced grades. Many companies touted as "leading-edge" actually rank employees against one another to provide ratings for performance reviews (as well as to know who to lay off when the economy dips).

It never ends! From your cradle to your grave, Western society teaches you to compare yourself with others. It teaches you to glorify those who come out on top because those who are on top must have "it". How else, the culture reasons, could they have succeeded?

We see the result all around us. Everyone keeps climbing all over each other trying to prove how great they are. They seek to validate their own sense of self-worth and identity within the culture. And many of them are unaware of why they're doing it.

This is the harvest of the fixed mindset. Everything is about people defending themselves against the idea that perhaps they aren't good enough. And because talent is a fixed quantity in the world of the fixed mindset, they're constantly trying to prove whatever amount of fixed quantity they have is good enough. Otherwise, they'll be considered "less" and therefore unacceptable.

Now, here's the real kicker. Because this cultural influence is most likely one of your assumptions, *you will think these things without realizing you're thinking them. You will also respond as your habits tell you to respond without realizing you're responding as they tell you to respond!* After all, these influences have been encoded into your habits which you're biologically hardwired to have and to follow.

The fixed mindset, in my opinion, produces the vast majority of our problems as we LDS singles try to create families. For example, suppose you have some bad experiences with dating. (OK, so maybe you don't have to suppose.) Is your normal response to get discouraged and give up because you think you don't have "it"?

Those with a fixed mindset will very easily think this. If you weren't born with whatever wonderful something it is you believe you need to succeed, then why try? Why torture yourself by proving what you fear, that you're unable to have your righteous desires for a temple marriage? After all, you just don't have "it".

More often we compare ourselves with others and think we don't measure up. This is another aspect of the fixed mindset. Often in such instances we quit without ever really trying. It's obvious you don't have

“it” if you aren’t as physically attractive or smart or coordinated or funny or whatever as someone else you may know.

You may even compare yourself to a hypothetical ideal. The hypothetical ideal person doesn’t actually exist. But Western culture has influenced us all to think that if, for example, you don’t look this good, then you don’t look good enough and are thus unacceptable. Or if you can’t make people laugh like this or laugh this much, then you aren’t worthy enough because you don’t have “it”. The list goes on and on.

Contrast these fruits of the fixed mindset with the harvest of the growth mindset. Those with a growth mindset believe they can improve and develop themselves through appropriate effort. Therefore, they don’t fear failure; they know failure doesn’t reflect on them but rather on their effort. They apply themselves to learning how to do better next time. And there’s always a next time.

Likewise, they don’t fear challenges. They understand challenge is the only way they can grow and become something more. Everything isn’t a competition for those with a growth mindset. Their sense of self-worth comes from somewhere else.

The Master’s parable of the talents supports having a growth mindset. The second servant who received two talents didn’t receive as much as the first servant who received five talents. But because he gave his all and increased what he was given just like the first servant, then just like the first servant the second servant received the same reward:

His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. (Matthew 25:23)

Just because the first servant received more than the rest did not relieve the second servant from the responsibility to improve upon what his lord gave him. He still had to work to increase his five talents. It was the third servant who hid his talent and did not improve upon it who displeased his lord.

But, I hear some of you protesting, some “talents” you just can’t improve upon. I’m not very good-looking. How am I supposed to get married if I’m not physically attractive?

First, saying you can’t improve upon something represents the fixed mindset. There’s much everyone can do to improve their physical appearance. For many of us, that journey begins by adopting a growth mindset and believing that, though it may be difficult, we can learn what

we need to learn about our bodies to make changes we need to make, such as losing weight and keeping it off, or wearing better clothes, or simply having a better attitude.

That brings us to the next point. Suggesting attraction is solely about physical proportions demonstrates a real misunderstanding of what attraction really is. True attraction is about the total package; those who excel in areas of life besides the physical can increase in physical attraction as we come to know and love them better. Those who excel in the physical and nothing else are truly among the ugliest of people.

By my own experience I know these assertions are true. I've seen supermodel women who became very unattractive once they revealed self-centered lack of consideration for others. Conversely, I was once engaged to a fat woman. Yes, she had "lots to love," but her kindness, her thoughtfulness, and her commitment to live the restored gospel were among several qualities that enhanced her in my eyes. The world considered her unacceptable because of her weight. When I looked at her, I saw a very beautiful woman.

The world with all its "wisdom" would have you believe that only the beautiful have "it". In the world's eyes, nothing else matters. Either you have "it" or you don't. And if you don't have "it", well, too bad for you. This is the fixed mindset.

The truth is that "successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities" (The Family: A Proclamation to the World). These qualities align with the growth mindset, the idea that we can learn and improve, that we can grow, that we can change.

Having a fixed mindset also encourages you to do everything on your own. If you need help, you obviously don't have "it". I believe this cultural influence is the biggest reason why so many of us find it hard to accept service from others. Because of our cultural programming, we fear that receiving help from anyone else will prove we couldn't hack it ourselves. And we don't want to appear like we don't have "it".

It doesn't have to be that way (pun intended). We can replace the fixed mindset with the growth mindset. When you assume you can acquire talent you don't have, you see service from others as an opportunity to learn something new and to improve upon yourself. Accepting service from others, rather than threatening you, becomes something you embrace.

No talent of any kind is innate. Even people who think they're not

“math people” can learn math. I see it every semester in the college math classes I teach. By helping students to adopt a more positive assumption (“I may not be able to do this yet, but I can learn how”), their eyes open to a whole new world, one in which they can succeed in math (and anything else they set their minds to do).

These students succeeded by changing their assumptions from the fixed mindset to the growth mindset. And by changing their thinking, they created a whole new reality for themselves. Instead of seeing failure as proof they weren’t good enough, they began to embrace failure for what it really is — an opportunity to learn and to improve upon themselves.

Many LDS singles can benefit from exchanging their fixed mindset for a growth one. For example, it’s easy to think you’re somehow inferior or defective or not good enough if you can’t get a date. If that describes you, focus instead on your efforts. Your failure to get a date doesn’t mean there’s something wrong with *you*. Your failure to get a date means there’s something wrong with *your effort*. You should ask yourself, “Why was it exactly my effort to get a date failed?” and then keep following that trail until you find real answers.

The thought-reality map bears this out. When you assume there’s something wrong with *you*, then your attitude will be one of discouragement and inaction. Such an attitude encourages emotions like despondency and hopelessness. And with those emotions in play, you won’t likely take any positive actions that produce the results you want.

However, when you assume there’s something wrong with *your effort*, you allow opportunity to embrace an optimistic attitude. It’s then easier to believe you could still succeed. Such an attitude encourages emotions of possibility, which in turn influence actions that can lead you to the results you want. Either way, your focus determines your reality.

The Great Western Disease

Many people think their life would be better if only they could have something they don’t now have. They think, “I’ll be happy when ____.” Some people fill that blank with a new job. For others, it’s that dream house. LDS singles often fill in the blank with their eternal companion. They think, “I’ll be happy when I get married.”

What an awful assumption to adopt for yourself! If you think marriage alone will solve all or even most of your problems, then here’s a story you need to hear. It’s about a woman in one of my family home

evening groups in college. We'll call her Mary.

Mary thought getting married as soon as possible was a sacred duty. Every week she had some new quote from a General Authority stressing the importance of marriage. Mary would present these quotes to me and my roommates as evidence to support behavioral change (in us, of course, never her). I always insisted we go back and read the entire discourse to apply the quote in context. How else, I reasoned, can we arrive at the true meaning?

Mary never liked doing that, because it always became clear the General Authority she quoted never supported marrying someone just to be married. Taken in context, the counsel was always some variant of choosing a marriage partner you won't regret having chosen.

My living arrangements changed with the next fall semester, and I found myself in a different ward. But one day I happened upon Mary while walking out of a building after a class. I saw her walking in and stopped for a brief chat. I learned Mary had married over the summer and was pregnant with her first child.

As we talked, it seemed Mary wasn't very happy. Try as she might to conceal it from me, I could see she was in fact miserable. I smiled and tried to cheer her as best I could. Then I wished her well as we parted ways. I never saw her again.

But I've thought about that meeting, both as I walked away then and on occasion through the passing years. Mary thought she would be happy when she got married. Then she got married and discovered marriage alone doesn't make one happy.

This realization probably surprised her initially. After all, she had only three desires in a husband. He needed to be handsome, a returned missionary, and desirous to get married ASAP. Mary got all three — everything on her list — and she was miserable! Mary had succumbed to a variant of the Great Western Disease by thinking she would be happy when she got married.

By the way, marrieds succumb to the Great Western Disease as much as singles. It's a different variation for marrieds but the same theme. Some are certainly like Mary, thinking marriage would make them happy and finding out it hasn't. But powered by inertia, many marrieds haven't stopped to think in those same terms. For example, many marrieds think, "I'll be happy when we have a new baby!" Or "I'll be happy when we can live closer to my parents." Or "I'll be happy when we can get a bigger house." Or . . . well, you get the idea.

With its push on the continuous acquisition of position and property, Western society has influenced many of us to fixate on the

future. Our focus always determines our reality, so when your focus is on the future, your reality becomes a life lived in the future.

You can't enjoy the life you have today if you're always living in tomorrow. The true joy in living comes from the moment. And here's the kicker: You don't get the joy of the moment unless you live in the moment. The end result, then, of thinking "I'll be happy when . . ." is misery, as my friend Mary found out in the School of Hard Knocks.

The thought-reality process map confirms this. When you assume you must have *something* in order to be happy, you won't feel happy so long as you don't have whatever that something is. And so long as your assumption remains unquestioned, you'll feel trapped if you can't acquire whatever you think you need to have in order to be happy.

You fix this problem by changing your assumption. Happiness doesn't come from having any sort of status or possession, *but from bringing your all to the right things*. That means more than just "keeping the standards." Going through the motions doesn't cut it. It's not just what you do or have that produces happiness. It's what you bring to what you do while doing the right things. This is the law of the harvest at work.

Here's an example to illustrate. We all know we should go to church. But if simply doing the right thing (in this case, attending church) makes you happy, then how come some people at church are not happy? Answer: Because just doing doesn't lead to happiness, even when those things are right.

Now consider those who come to church intent on making a contribution. Those people are *always* happy. Why? Because happiness results not just from doing the right things but from what you bring to what you do while doing the right things.

The prophet Moroni wrote, "And the church did meet together oft, to fast and to pray, and to *speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls*" (Moroni 6:5, emphasis added). They didn't come to church to play the sponge; they came to contribute! I would argue that, even with the Nephite civilization on its last breath, these faithful saints were happy because of what they brought to doing the right things.

Likewise, simply acting out your part during the marriage ceremony won't make you happy, however "right" that marriage may be. What will make you happy is what you bring to that ceremony before your wedding day, on your wedding day, and continually through your life after your wedding day. One of the best things you can bring is the joy of living in the present. But to experience the joy of living in the present, you must actually live in the present.

That begs an obvious question: How do you live in the present? The simple answer is by making conscious choices and keeping your focus on what you're doing here and now in the present moment. Let go of your concerns about everything outside the present moment and focus on experiencing fully what's right in front of you. These conscious choices will help you to resist the default option of inertia as well as to live in the moment.

Too many LDS singles occupy their attentions too much with dreams of an idyllic future — a future that never seems to come. Meanwhile the present moment right in front of them keeps slipping away. As one of our great hymns teaches,

Time flies on wings of lightning;
 We cannot call it back.
 It comes then passes forward
 Along its onward track.
 And if we are not mindful,
 The chance will fade away,
 For life is quick in passing.
 'Tis as a single day.
 (“Improve the Shining Moments”, *Hymns*, no. 226)

President Monson has taught, “We enter mortality not to float with the moving currents of life, but . . . to think, to reason, and to achieve” (Thomas S. Monson, “An Invitation to Exaltation” *Liahona*, Aug-Sep 1986). By making conscious choices, you can live in the here and now instead of in a tomorrow that never comes. By so doing, you make good use of the gifts of agency and time God has given to everyone.

While you make conscious choices, your focus is kept here in the moment. That is precisely where your focus belongs. Keeping your focus on a future that never comes produces a reality in which you're always yearning and never satisfied. By keeping your focus on living in the present moment, your reality becomes matched with the place where you are. Joining those two elements together grants access to the maximum joy of living.

All that said, this prospect simply doesn't attract some people. They don't want to live in their present because it's just too chaotic. Satan actually takes advantage of these situations to entice people to break covenants. He convinces them with twisted logic that breaking a covenant is the only way they can escape their present craziness. What Satan advertises as an escape, of course, is really just another one of his

traps designed to ensnare and to enslave.

If your present is too crazy right now to seem attractive, then don't assume the only way out is to break your covenants. Talk about faulty ways of thinking! Choose to assume the opposite, that there's always a way out of your craziness while still keeping your covenants. When you make that positive assumption, you'll inspire an attitude within yourself that encourages hope and optimism.

You'll also be more likely to take positive action to improve your situation. On that note, I strongly encourage you to find someone who can help you to face your challenges. When life appears so crazy as to be overwhelming, you need to obey the sign staring you in the face. In case you can't see the sign, it says, "Get help!" Stop, take a step back, and find someone who can help you to see more objectively. Don't do it alone!

We judge *every* book by its cover

We've all heard the old adage "Never judge a book by its cover." Yet we all do it. Why? Because we're not designed to think but rather to follow habits, and we have habits that tell us to judge a book by its cover.

That brings us to an important aspect of how we as human beings are hardwired. Because we do without thinking about what we're doing, we can think we *don't* do what we in fact *do* do. This means most of us who do something widely recognized as bad probably think we don't do that bad something.

Why aren't we more honest? Why is there a disconnect with reality? Because that's the nature of habit. Western culture then takes that nature a step further. The cultural notion of "it" has scripted us to claim that we don't do what is considered bad. That way we can appear and feel validated and accepted. And because this is habit, we'll claim this even when the reality may be we're doing just the opposite.

Suppose you see a young man with elephant ears and slicked hair. He wears a tucked-in, button-up shirt and Coke-bottle glasses held together with tape around the nose bridge. Your first impression of this person is probably that he is very book smart and physically inept. Yet for all you know, he may be a closet karate king.

One year in college, my roommate left to serve a mission. I was looking for a replacement. That's when I met Ben. He was a big, brawny guy who looked like a shoe-in as a fullback for the football team. As I would learn later, he actually did play football in high school.

I'll never forget my experience meeting Ben for the first time. To

someone like me — scrawny, not very active physically, and not caring very much about football — Ben presented a rather imposing sight. He looked like he could crush my skull with one of his bare hands and then pound the rest of my body into the ground with the other one.

As he walked towards me, he called me by name. He asked if I was looking for a roommate. I confirmed I was, although I felt so extremely intimidated by his size I wanted to come up with a convenient excuse to go somewhere else. But that didn't happen. Ben sealed the deal quickly. The next thing I knew I had agreed to room with Ben for the following year.

I'm very glad I couldn't think of that excuse. Ben turned out to be one of the best friends I ever had. That year we planned to be roommates together turned out to be closer to a semester (he got married and so moved out), but my experience was unforgettable. The time we spent together rocked both our worlds. We shared not only similar interests but also similar dispositions and perspectives. Just about every day was a total blast! To this day I consider Ben a good friend. Every now and then we connect and catch up.

What would have happened had I allowed my initial impression of Ben's outward appearance to determine everything I thought about him? I would have missed one of the best friendships I've ever had! His exterior was nothing at all like his interior. Had I dismissed him as incompatible with little old weakling me who cared nothing about football. I would have missed out on the experiences that today form some of my best memories of university days.

Many LDS singles do exactly the same thing when it comes to dating. Men and women focus on the exterior at the expense of the interior. We judge people based on their outside appearance without bothering to get to know what those people are *really* all about.

This is truly shameful. In our rush to reach the end of our dating journey, we blind ourselves to potential opportunities both of support and to support. We deprive ourselves of some wonderful friendships that can sustain us through the difficult times of singles life. We also ignore the teachings of modern day prophets that what makes marriages successful comes mostly from the inside.

The idea of falling hopelessly in love with your true love at first sight is incredibly romantic. And real marriages can be magical. But in the real world, sooner or later there comes a time when you need to pull out the smelling salts (or whatever wakes you up).

Western European courtiers in the Middle Ages invented the idea of love at first sight to make arranged marriages more palpable. Consider

the culture of that time and place. Only the elites of society, those in the nobility class, lived comfortably. To continue that wealth and social status across generations required marrying within one's social class. That often meant marrying for convenience and not choice. For those who would have liked to have chosen differently, stories of knights rescuing fair maidens who fell in love with them at first sight offered a wonderful escape.

This doesn't mean you can't have true love. True loves *are* real, but they're more made than found. And sometimes they defy expectations. Check out this experience from Kathryn, a married LDS woman.

In many ways, my husband is very different from the type of man I always thought I would marry. *Had I not been open to all possible candidates, I would not have discovered my true love.* Looking at people to date not just in terms of how they would be as a spouse but how they could be as a friend might help alleviate the pressure and make each dating experience more successful. Some single people seem to place too much importance on each and every date. Enjoyment and friendship may come through relaxing and trying to discover the great qualities about each individual irrespective of that person's possibilities as a spouse ("Questions and Answers", *Ensign*, March 2006 [emphasis added]).

Kathryn's experience is profound. By suspending judgements and opening herself to new possibilities, she found her true love because *her true love was not what she imagined he would be.* What a lesson for all!

In order to bring new possibilities into your reality, you must include new possibilities into your focus. That means consciously choosing not to judge people solely by appearances. It also means opening yourself to options you might otherwise ignore or not consider.

Elder Russell M. Ballard shared an account that describes this need to broaden one's focus while searching for what's valuable.

Oftentimes we are like the young merchant from Boston, who in 1849, as the story goes, was caught up in the fervor of the California gold rush. He sold all of his possessions to seek his fortune in the California rivers, which he was told were filled with gold nuggets so big that one could hardly carry them.

Day after endless day, the young man dipped his pan into the river and came up empty. His only reward was a growing

pile of rocks. Discouraged and broke, he was ready to quit until one day an old, experienced prospector said to him, “That’s quite a pile of rocks you are getting there, my boy.”

The young man replied, “There’s no gold here. I’m going back home.”

Walking over to the pile of rocks, the old prospector said, “Oh, there is gold all right. You just have to know where to find it.” He picked two rocks up in his hands and crashed them together. One of the rocks split open, revealing several flecks of gold sparkling in the sunlight.

Noticing a bulging leather pouch fastened to the prospector’s waist, the young man said, “I’m looking for nuggets like the ones in your pouch, not just tiny flecks.”

The old prospector extended his pouch toward the young man, who looked inside, expecting to see several large nuggets. He was stunned to see that the pouch was filled with thousands of flecks of gold.

The old prospector said, “Son, it seems to me you are so busy looking for large nuggets that you’re missing filling your pouch with these precious flecks of gold. The patient accumulation of these little flecks has brought me great wealth” (M. Russell Ballard, “Finding Joy Through Loving Service,” April 2011 General Conference).

The experience of that young man reflects the dating vision of many LDS singles today. Because they hold false assumptions regarding what their true love must be like, they ignore the flecks of gold all around them in the search for a large nugget. The cultural notion of “it” feeds this habit. After all, flecks of gold don’t make you “acceptable” like a large nugget does. But if you broaden your vision to discard the cultural notion of “it”, you’ll recognize the great value in the flecks of gold that surround you.

Conversely, if you’re constantly trying to prove yourself, then you won’t be open to all possibilities. You’ll be far too focused on validating yourself by getting someone else who has “it” to be at your side. And not being open to all possibilities means you might miss that person who, despite initial appearances and impressions, is your *real* true love.

Open yourself to possibilities. Don’t let inertia keep you keeping on down the wrong path. Fight back with the power of conscious choice. Choose to adopt positive, constructive assumptions. True loves are more made than found. What you’re truly looking for may be outside your

expectations. Don't be afraid to step outside what you simply "know" you have to have. You just might be glad to find out how much you really don't know.

A culture within a culture

Because we're members of the societies in which we live, we Latter-day Saints are influenced by the cultures of those societies. But because the standards of the gospel are different from those of the world, the complete cultural context of a Latter-day Saint holds some notable differences.

One of the most important distinctions of LDS subculture is the place of marriage within the life of the individual. In particular, LDS subculture views temple marriage as a rite of passage — a cultural ritual which one must experience to be accepted by others within that culture. Think of it as admittance to the club.

This is why 30-something singles attending general membership wards can feel as though twenty-something married members are more accepted than they are. This could simply be perception, or it could in fact be real. Because singles have yet to experience the rite of passage, others can view singles as somehow inferior in the context of LDS subculture.

We may not talk about it that much. But that doesn't make it any less real. The difference between those who have experienced the rite of passage and those who have not is very evident, especially to those on the "wrong" side of the rite of passage.

The film *The Singles Ward* expresses this difference very succinctly when protagonist Jonathan Jordan provides this monologue: "When you meet someone at a bar, you only have to be good for two or three hours at the most. But when you meet somebody at church, already off the bat you're being evaluated for time and all eternity" (29:27-39).

These types of judgements run rampant in the world of LDS dating. Those judging usually consider someone to be unacceptable because he or she doesn't want to live with "that" for eternity (whatever "that" is). Such thinking doesn't consider the potential people can achieve in the future or any propensity to change. It assumes the way someone is now is the way he or she will always be.

Likewise, those considered unacceptable can operate under the same assumption. When they for whatever reason fail to pass through the temple marriage rite of passage, they feel especially disheartened. Their assumptions condition acceptance and validation on their ability to get

married, and their fixed mindset convinces them that will never change. I hope you're seeing how insidious the cultural notion of "it" and the fixed mindset really are, especially in how they interfere with the creation of righteous families.

"It" and the fixed mindset also greatly damage individuals. While in my twenties, I felt incredibly pressured to be perfect all the time. I also believed I wouldn't get a first date unless I met some woman's standard of perfection. Unamazingly, only two of the few first dates I did get resulted in a second date.

This situation left me feeling extremely frustrated. On one hand, so many of my invitations were rejected. On the other hand, I was told it was my "priesthood duty" to date these same "sweet" sisters. Combined with the Western cultural influence regarding "it" and the fixed mindset, I concluded wrongly that my constant rejection meant I didn't have "it" and therefore was unacceptable.

But according to LDS subculture, I was more than just refuse. I was eternally damned because I wasn't married. Add the poor state of my career as I approached my 30th birthday, and it's little wonder I was almost clinically depressed. Had I known about the fixed mindset and the thought-reality process map, my life might have been different.

By all means we should have criteria when it comes to dating. Standards are important. In fact, standards are essential for making good decisions. That's why you must make sure you use the right standards *with the right assumptions*. Assuming people never change just doesn't match reality. The truth is *all people will change over time*.

Ever heard of personality aging? Personality aging is a theory connected with Briggs-Meyers personality typing. And it describes the way people change over time.

Personality aging doesn't mean someone's personality changes over time. It means the lesser developed sides of a person's personality will begin to manifest themselves as that person ages. As stated before, it's connected with Briggs-Myers personality typing.

Briggs-Meyers personality typing describes your personality with four aspects. Although these four aspects exist together, not every aspect exerts the same influence over you at any given time in your life. One of the four aspects is dominant and begins to exercise that dominance very early in life. Then as you age, the other aspects begin to take on more prominence in succession until late in life when all four have found some means of expression. This theory of personality aging explains why people have a "mid-life crisis." Less dominant aspects of one's personality type which have always been there begin demanding

to be expressed.

You can think of personality aging as a 1950s family in an automobile. The father is the patriarch of the family and so sits in the driver's seat from the earliest days of the family. The mother sits beside him, and two children sit in the back seat. One of the children is a toddler, and the other child is a few years older.

At this stage of the family's "age," the father clearly commands the vehicle. But as everyone gets older, eventually the children in the back seat become adolescents and want to drive as well. In like manner, we all have less dominant sides of our personality type that don't express themselves when we're young. But as we get older the voices of these same less dominant sides get louder and louder.

Instead of looking at people solely as they are now, try looking at people also as they'll likely become. Current position is important, but direction is even more so. Someone could be in the right place today and the wrong place tomorrow. But someone moving in the right direction today will eventually be in the right place.

This point applies to everyone, single or married. Eternal marriage is part of the divinely appointed progression our Heavenly Father wants all His children to experience. Yet somehow LDS subculture conditions full acceptance on being married with children. This means LDS married couples who can't have children are challenged just as much as LDS singles are.

We need to stop the harmful habit of accepting only those who easily fit within the subculture and start the essential habit of helping *everyone* advance along the path of eternal progression. We need to stop assuming everyone should be married by their 25th birthday or that the arrival of children should immediately follow marriage. The exact time to marry and to have a family for everyone is different, but the exact time for all of us to help each other is now.

Instead of judging one another, we should be reaching out to one another. Obviously, all things being equal, marrying young is much more desirable — and with good reason. We should all strive for that standard. But we should also exercise more compassion for those whose continual best efforts fall short of that standard. King Benjamin once taught,

For behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all the substance which we have, for both food and raiment, and for gold, and for silver, and for all the riches which we have of every kind?

And behold, even at this time, ye have been calling on his name, and begging for a remission of your sins. And has he suffered that ye have begged in vain? Nay; he has poured out his Spirit upon you, and has caused that your hearts should be filled with joy, and has caused that your mouths should be stopped that ye could not find utterance, so exceedingly great was your joy.

And now, if God, who has created you, on whom you are dependent for your lives and for all that ye have and are, doth grant unto you whatsoever ye ask that is right, in faith, believing that ye shall receive, O then, how ye ought to impart of the substance that ye have one to another (Mosiah 4:19-21).

That “substance” includes where we each are in the road of eternal life. Some of us are further along the path of progression than others. Many of those others are not as progressed because something blocks their path or provides great difficulty for them. They need help. If you yourself are further along, please reach out and walk with those who need help taking their next steps. And you start to help best when you shed the destructive assumption that the time that was right for you is right for everyone else as well.

We can all learn and improve. That’s a positive, constructive assumption consistent with a growth mindset. And we can all help one another to progress along the path to our eternal home. Regardless of where each of us are on that path, none of us will reach that glorious destination unless we arrive there together.

And we will all, married and single, change with the passage of time. It’s natural law. That’s just the way God established our universe. But the key question each one of us should ask will depend on our individual situation.

For example, the key question marrieds should ask in helping singles along the road to eternity is less “Why doesn’t So-an-So just get married?” and more “What difficulties is So-and-So encountering in progressing to eternal marriage, and how can I help So-and-So to overcome those challenges?” Obviously we’re all different, so some singles will welcome greater levels of involvement than others. And conversely, some of us feel more comfortable helping those around them in less direct ways than in more direct ones.

But regardless of those proclivities, LDS singles need the married members in their midst to walk with them. If you’re married, you surely understand marriage as an institution has built within it someone to

walk with you. Because everyone has imperfections, that companion may not always be the most desirable. But an imperfect companion, warts and all, is still someone.

Who walks with the singles? In theory, they can find friends to walk with them by participating in singles groups, but that theory breaks down for many LDS singles in practice. They live continually with needs only others can meet. By involving themselves more in the lives of LDS singles, LDS marrieds can both foster the unity of the faith that typifies Zion and increase everyone's support for families by helping to create them.

LDS singles themselves should constantly strive towards eternal blessings. The key question singles should ask is less "Does this dating prospect meet my standard *now*?" and more "How likely is it this candidate *will* meet my standard?" Don't get me wrong. Asking the first question *is* important. You need to make such assessments in order to judge righteously. But alone it's insufficient. Asking both questions together helps you to focus on fundamentals and to be more accepting of and patient with others' imperfections. As anyone with experience with marriage will tell you, learning that acceptance is essential for a successful and happy marriage.

Besides, who wants to live with the never-ending pressure of having to be perfect? The Savior did say, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48), but He also never expected any one of us to reach that state of perfection in this life. The Savior suffered the Atonement so that all men and women could become perfected in Him. That process has both an immediate component (see Alma 34:31) and a gradual component (see Moroni 10:32-33). Good thing eternity is a long time. I know I'm going to need it.

Be yourself

Some years ago my married brother was giving me advice about my seemingly perpetual single status. "You know what your problem is?" he told me. "You need to just be yourself." How many LDS singles have heard this bit of advice?

"Oh, really?" came my reply. "And just who do you think I've been trying to be all these years? Telling me to be myself suggests I've been trying to be someone else, so who exactly do you think I've been trying to be?" He didn't have an answer.

I'm glad my brother tried to help. Though I found little assistance in his effort, I recognize the goodness of his intention. In like manner,

many LDS marrieds offer counsel that LDS singles often find less than practical. That doesn't make the counsel any less true, however. We need to distinguish between the packaging and the contents.

What my brother's approach lacked in packaging it surpassed in content. LDS singles really do need to be relaxed in dating and other efforts to prepare for marriage. If not, others will sense it and become unnerved, thus hampering the effectiveness of the journey as LDS singles trip over their own feet.

LDS singles know dating leads to marriage. In fact, they've heard it so much it's easy to think dating practically *is* marriage. Unfortunately, that faulty assumption seems to have permeated its way throughout LDS subculture. We can correct that faulty way of thinking by better understanding the fundamentals of the dating journey.

Sometimes LDS singles feel like they need to be someone they aren't in order to achieve success. Under the cultural notion of "it" and a fixed mindset, you might believe you absolutely have to achieve a certain high standard (be good looking enough or funny enough or "whatever" enough) just to be accepted or validated. Under that way of thinking, you'll likely feel you'll never be loved as you are now if you fall short.

This line of thinking concludes with the idea that you must in effect "kill" yourself, meaning you must become someone you're not in order to progress. Such a conclusion leaves many singles wondering why they can't just be accepted as they are. Why, they wonder, do I need to act like someone I'm not in order to progress eternally?

If you struggle with this question, what you really struggle with is identity. That question assumes that who you are now won't change. As mentioned previously, that's a false assumption perpetuated by a fixed mindset. Everyone will change with time. But if you adopt that false assumption, you'll feel a disconnect when you consider changing your behavior to something unnatural, something not "you."

You'll always feel dishonest or less than genuine if you change your behavior without changing your identity. That's because your proposed actions don't match who you are. The answer, then, lies in changing both your behavior and your identity so that the two match. You can then be different and feel authentic at the same time.

Or put another way, when your self-image doesn't mirror your self-ideal, then either your self-esteem will be warped or you'll sense a gap in your identity. Either way, your self-concept, or the mental construct you have of yourself, is unbalanced.

Your self-concept has three components: self-image, self-ideal, and self-esteem. Your self-image is the way you see and think about

yourself. Your self-ideal is the person that you most want to become, in essence your ideal form of you. Your self-esteem is the way you feel about yourself. And you won't feel very balanced when the way you see yourself doesn't match the way you idealize yourself.

Figure 2 depicts the concept of balance in self-concept. When your self-image mirrors your self-ideal, as shown in the self-concept circle on the left, then your sense of self-esteem is balanced. You feel authentic because all three elements match up the same way.

Now consider what happens when your self-image and self-ideal don't mirror each other. You develop one of two self-concepts. You'll experience an identity gap within your self-concept, or you'll have to twist your self-esteem to close the gap. Either way, you'll feel fake because all three elements don't really match up the same way.

I remember once learning of a despairing 30-something single sister. She bemoaned her situation as hopeless because she could never get the attention of the few men at singles activities in her area. She's been historically shy and reserved, and the more extroverted ladies would consistently beat her to the punch. With that vision in her focus, she saw no room for escape, no reason to hope in a better reality. How many LDS singles have experienced something similar?

Yet notice how I said she's been *historically* shy. If you asked her to describe herself, she wouldn't say she's been historically shy. She would just say that she *is* shy. That's because that's how she thinks about herself, with a fixed mindset that doesn't allow for change.

But she hasn't been shy because shyness is somehow genetic. She's been shy because that's the identity that she adopted for herself, an identity which has become a habit. She's not shy by *fact*; she's shy by *assumption*.

That assumption is part of her self-image. And because her self-image doesn't match her self-ideal, she feels inauthentic in trying to be anything but shy. Moreover, her lack of self-esteem caused by this mismatch feeds several elements of the thought-reality process map with negativity, resulting in her feeling alone and without hope.

Adopting a growth mindset provides the way out of her dilemma. She can change her identity, choose to be more extroverted, and then develop the social skills needed to succeed. Then her future would look much more hopeful. By changing her self-image to match her self-ideal, she'd feel authentic in being something she hasn't been before. Her self-esteem would also improve. With that improvement would come a positive flow into every element of the thought-reality process map. That would yield a change in her reality.

Here’s the best part: She doesn’t have to take large steps in that direction. She needs only to move in that direction. Position or rate of travel are not as important as direction. She charts a new direction by adopting a new assumption about herself.

If all she said was “I’m a student extrovert,” that would be enough. She could even interrupt the other sisters who are talking to the guy she wants to talk with and say something like, “Excuse me, but I was wondering if you could help me. I’m trying to be less shy and more social. Could you give me some tips that would help me?” Seriously, what guy is going to say no to that? If there is such a man, no single sister in Zion should be interested in him.

The unique person you are doesn’t need to “die” for you to achieve your desires for eternal marriage. But you do need to recognize how you see yourself and make improvements where needed. You can change your behavior without feeling you’re abandoning your true self. The key is to change not just your behavior but also your sense of identity. You must change the way you see yourself to match your best sense of who you are.

Believe in ability, not just success

You’ll find it difficult to change the way you see yourself if you

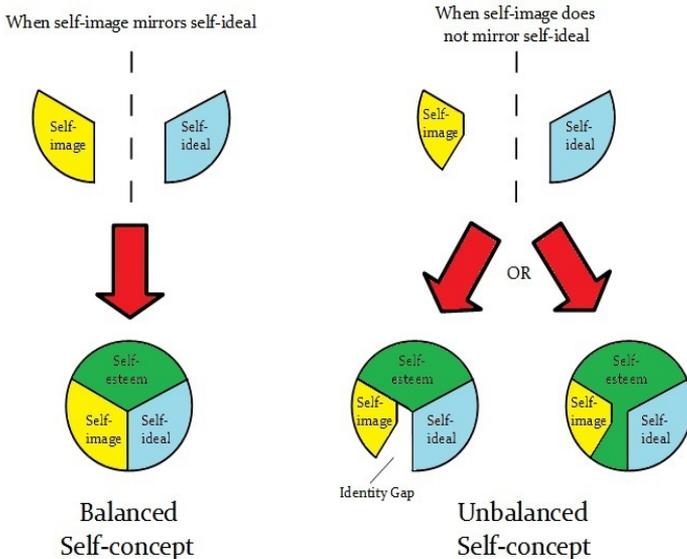


Figure 2 Self-concept balance

believe you simply don't have what it takes to succeed in making needed, positive changes. If you have a fixed mindset, you'll likely quit before you even begin. When you choose to focus on the negative in your life, the flame of belief can flicker very low.

You have undoubtedly heard many people extol the power of positive thinking. All you need to do, they preach, is to think positive and good things will come from that. Just believe, and you'll receive.

Like these people, I believe you have to believe in your own success if you're ever to achieve your dreams. That very idea underlies the entire thought-reality process map. Where you focus your thinking determines your reality.

However, my experience teaches me that belief in success alone doesn't produce success. You must couple that belief with another assumption — a belief in your *ability* to succeed. You must believe not just that success is possible, but that it's probable for you.

The distinction is very important. It's one thing to believe success is *possible* for you, that what you want to happen could happen. It's quite another to believe success is *probable* for you because you have the ability to achieve success and you're taking action to move towards that success.

Simply believing in success alone leaves open the door to the cultural notion of "it". People with a fixed mindset believe that success exists — for someone else. These people typically get all pumped up at the start with the gospel of positive thinking. Then life happens; they get poor results from their efforts, or something unexpected turns all their efforts to naught. Their fixed mindset then convinces them they don't have "it," and so they quit trying. So much for the power of positive thinking, they think to themselves.

But if you adopt a growth mindset by replacing the idea of "it" with the assumption that *you can get what you need if you do not now have it*, you're better prepared to succeed. Then if you see poor results from your efforts, instead of concluding you don't have "it", you can ask yourself, "What would I need to do in order to get better results next time?" Then organize a plan to keep moving toward success. Believing in your success is important, but believing in your ability to succeed is even more important.

This may seem difficult for some LDS singles to do, especially if they haven't had much success with dating. How can you believe in your ability to succeed when your past demonstrates abundant failure? By understanding that all failure means is that your effort failed. Failure *never* means you *can't* ever succeed.

If you believe your past determines your future, you have a faulty assumption. Per the thought-reality process map, faulty assumptions always lead to a sub-par reality. In order to improve your reality, you need to improve your thinking. Replace your faulty assumption with a correct one. Reformat and reboot yourself.

All failure means is that the particular effort you made was not successful. Why that effort was not successful is a separate question. And you should ask yourself that question when you do fail. Belief in your ability to succeed underlies such a question. Believing you have the ability to succeed allows you to move forward.

If you don't believe you have the ability to succeed, why would you even try? And what success will you have if you never try? I got your answer in five words: None, zip, zilch, zero, nada.

Acting on the belief you can get what you need if you do not have it is powerful. It leads you to determine what you need to succeed, identify what you need but lack, and then seek to understand how to get what you lack. That journey can be just as enjoyable as the success you desire.

Begin today. Understand the role of habits in your life. Reformat and reboot yourself. Reject the fixed mindset and the cultural notion of "it" by adopting a growth mindset and making conscious choices designed to move you forward.

Tear down this wall

The growth mindset can additionally help a particular group of LDS singles: those needing to transition between YSA and SA groupings. Many of these singles leave the Church because their fixed mindset is closed to possible solutions. It takes vision to change the way people think and see the world so they can in turn choose to approach their problems productively.

On 12 June 1987, U.S. President Ronald Reagan made a historic speech not far from the Berlin Wall. Constructed by the Soviets and their East German allies in 1961, the Wall separated Berlin into East and West. By the time President Reagan made his historic speech, the Wall had become a permanent fixture. It stood as a constant barrier not only for Berliners but also for people all over the world. That's why President Reagan's speech sent shockwaves around the world. He addressed then Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev with the words "Mr. Gorbachav, tear down this wall!"

Two years later, the Wall came down. I still remember the video

from newscasts in November 1989. They showed all sorts of people tearing down pieces of the Wall and standing on top of the Wall while they locked arms, dancing, singing, celebrating. East and West were no more separated.

At least not physically. For many years after the physical wall came down, a psychological wall still existed in the minds of Berliners. Many of them no doubt helped to tear down that physical wall. They were dancing and singing on what was left of it. And yet they still saw themselves as East and West Berliners. Even after Germany was reunified, these psychological barriers continued. While in one sense they were living together, in yet another sense they were living apart.

If you understand the role of habits in decision making, it shouldn't be hard to see why the psychological barrier remained after the physical one had been removed. Because a division between East and West was assumed to be true, Berliners habitually saw one another in terms of East and West. This assumption was true while the physical wall stood.

But when the physical wall fell, that assumption was no longer true. Now it didn't match the new landscape. Yet people continued with that assumption even though it didn't match the new landscape because having that assumption was a habit. Inertia will keep all of us keeping on with the status quo unless we recognize what we're doing and make repeated conscious choices to do otherwise.

LDS singles who need to transition between YSA and SA groupings are no exception. Just because you leave YSA World (whether willingly or kicking and screaming) doesn't mean you'll change your thinking to match the new landscape of your life. Habits continue with you even though they may be ineffective or irrelevant.

Of course, if this is your dilemma, the answer should be obvious. You need to change the way you think to match the new landscape. Unfortunately, most of us never do that. Gripped by inertia, we keep on keeping on with old ways of thinking and identifying ourselves even though those old ways no longer apply.

Why do so many YSAs cling very desperately to their old YSA identities once they've been escorted out? Because they're acting out a habit they've developed. And that's normal. Acting out our habits is how we *all* were designed to function.

What's worse, many of them don't know the role of habits in their lives! They never think to question how they think about themselves and see the world. They see the new landscape doesn't match their old habits of thinking, and gripped by inertia they resist the change. For far too many, that resistance includes leaving the spiritual safety of the

Church.

If you haven't experienced the YSA-SA transition but you have seen the 1999 film *The Mummy*, you might come to understand the experience in part. It's kind of like that scene where a chariot from the underworld rushes into Imhotep and carries off the immortal part of his soul. This makes him mortal and therefore conquerable by the heroes. Imhotep is seen chasing after the chariot as it rushes off. He really didn't want to let go of that part of himself.

That's something like what LDS singles experience in this transition. When they take a look at the SA group for the first time, most LDS singles come to a realization that really jolts them. And when I say jolt, I mean **jolt!** It's like you unexpectedly and forcefully hit a brick wall, knocking out some part of you. Then you find yourself screaming "Noooooooo!" in slow motion and reaching after that part of you because you really don't want to be without it.

Had I understood the role of habits in my life, things might have been different. The expectation I carried over from YSA World was to identify myself with a group of LDS singles who were about my age. But seeing the world through generational lenses which God doesn't use didn't match the new landscape. A better assumption would have been to identify myself as an active Latter-day Saint who views others as God sees them — as His children.

Unfortunately, most LDS singles who confront this transition out of the YSA program see anything but happiness. And the response many of them have provided in overwhelming numbers is to leave the Church. Because most people don't understand the role of habits in their life, they will naturally separate themselves from a new landscape that doesn't match their habitual way of seeing themselves and their world.

To stem this tide of migration out of the fold, an alternative known as the Midsingles Program has arisen. This alternative allows LDS singles to maintain their old, habitual ways of thinking without feeling the need to leave the Church. Considering what we've learned about the role of habits in decision making, is this alternative digging deep enough to get at the root of the problem?

The Midsingles age range varies by location. It starts between 26 and 31 and ends between 40 and 45. The grouping sponsors age-specific activities. Singles can associate with other singles who are "more like" them, just like in their former YSA days. Because it attempts to change the landscape in which old ways of thinking no longer need to be changed, the program has spread rather quickly. Under the influence of inertia, many people will instantly gravitate to something that allows

them to keep on keeping on with old ways of thinking. In essence, the Midsingles Program prospers because it allows people to continue to think YSA without actually being YSA.

One important aspect seems perpetually missing from every discussion I've encountered regarding the Midsingles program. The Midsingles program was once *nowhere* mentioned in the General Handbook of Instructions — the set of two manuals that describe general Church policies and procedures. Then the Handbook was updated with this caveat: “As an *exception*, stake presidents may recommend the creation of a single adult ward for single adults ages 31 to 45.” (Handbook 2:16.1, emphasis added). The Handbook never names the Midsingles program specifically.

If the Midsingles program is the exception, then what's the rule? That's explained in the directly preceding text:

Leaders encourage single members ages 31 and older to participate in the regular activities and programs of their conventional stakes and wards. These stakes and wards can provide a full range of Church experiences and can offer opportunities to serve, teach, lead, and associate with people of all ages. Conventional wards can also reinforce the important role of the family and the home in the gospel plan. (Handbook 2:16.1)

We should also note this text from the section introduction: “Leaders support single members by helping them draw near to the Lord, strengthen their testimonies, and take responsibility for their own spiritual, social, and temporal well-being” (Handbook 2:16).

Identifying a 30-something singles ward as an exception to the rule is very telling. It indicates the vision the Brethren want us to have with regards to building the Kingdom. And when it comes to building the Kingdom, I want to follow the Brethren. In addition, I want to support those efforts which encourage everyone else to follow the Brethren.

What is the vision of the Brethren for single adults? Clearly it is *not* to have a Midsingles program established in every stake in Zion. The Handbook identifies such programs as the exception and not the rule.

In fact, everything I have seen in the Handbook convinces me the Brethren envision *adults* acting their age. They should exercise some maturity by doing what they can to evaluate and meet their own needs rather than depend upon a Church program to do that for them. That means, as a general rule, participation in general membership wards.

That's not to say that there aren't any advantages to offering a 30-something singles forum. The exception exists because some exceptional circumstances do exist. The way the Church administers any program will always be local.

If the *real* root of the problem lies in the way we think about ourselves and perceive the world — and having extolled the thought-reality process map as virtuous, I fervently believe it does — then a platform in which we can reach these singles and help them to adjust the way they think and perceive their world is very much needed. How do you help people to change the way they think if they're inactive or apostate? Answer: You don't, because you'll never get the opportunity. The Midsingles Program provides a *possible* platform for leaders to minister to this demographic.

I stress the word *possible*. If all we do is just collect people together without addressing the real issue at hand (which is the failure for 20-something single adults to create righteous families), then what problem are we really solving? The same cries of exclusion we once heard from 31-year-olds before the Midsingles Program came along we now hear from those in their mid-40s. We've done nothing but move a boundary.

If we're not addressing how people think, then how are we doing anything more than move a boundary when all we do is establish a forum in which people can think YSA without actually being YSA? Aren't we just kicking the can down the road? Simply creating a group in which people can continue with old ways of thinking and then doing nothing to help those same people to adopt new and better ways of thinking means choosing to address the issue later. And when reckoning time comes as it always does, what's to make us think we'll solve then what didn't get solved now?

This very question precisely addresses the biggest issue arising from solutions like the Midsingles Program. By instituting yet another program, and on top of it one which allows people to continue with ineffective, habitual ways of thinking, all we've really done is move the boundary of that perceived "God-forsaken wasteland." Now the frontier really starts somewhere around 45 instead of 31.

The *substance* of the perception in people's minds hasn't really changed. All that's changed is the *boundary*. How does shifting the boundary resolve the failure to create righteous families? How does giving singles more time to play out their ineffective habits based in old, defunct ways of thinking solve the *real* problem?

I'm grateful I lived in an area that did *not* have the Midsingles Program. It forced me to shed my generational lenses and to see my

more mature brothers and sisters as just that — my brothers and sisters. It allowed me to learn from those who had walked further down the road of life than I had. I gave me insight from experience without having to have the experience myself. And it filled me with a greater sense of compassion and empathy as I reached out to singles of all ages, backgrounds, and circumstances.

At the same time, I'm grateful I also lived in a place where the Midsingles Program was active. Granted my experience in a Midsingles magnet ward wasn't the best. I felt more acceptance from the married members of that ward than I did from the singles. Most of the singles wouldn't even talk to me. A few did, but most didn't.

I can see how those singles who are accepted by their peers would consider the Midsingles arrangement essential. I also learned much from my exclusion. For one, I felt a greater sense of solidarity with One for whom there was also no room in the inn.

I'm also grateful the Brethren, in their wisdom, have determined that individual stakes should decide how to minister to this part of their flock. The stake president holds the keys for administering the gospel to Single Adults in his stake. He's the one appointed to receive the revelation regarding how local leaders administer to this demographic within stake boundaries.

Some believe those who don't conform to their particular solution are somehow "behind the times." I need to exercise greater patience when I encounter such statements. How we administer the gospel always has been and always will be *local*. Two nearby stakes could address the same question very differently, and *there's nothing wrong with that*.

Considering the role habits play in our lives, instruments such as the Midsingles Program simply don't dig deep enough to address the real issue. They *could*, but they don't. And because these attempts — all made in good faith and with the best of intentions — don't get to the underlying root of the problem, they only snip at the leaves, leaving the weeds to grow back another day.

Let's not support anyone to think YSA without actually being YSA. Instead, let's help people to change the way they think. Singles can then develop new habits that better match their existing landscape. That makes them far more marriageable than assembling a list of activities with similar aged folk. *Helping singles to become more marriageable addresses the real root of the real problem.*

This stance doesn't make me anti-Midsingles, just anti-old-defunct-ways-of-thinking. The Midsingles Program *could* serve as a platform to

minister to individual singles. It could help many singles to adopt new and more effective ways of thinking. Yet all I've seen the Midsingles Program do so far is simply provide activities for 30-something singles to congregate. *To address the real root of the problem, leaders need to help individual single adults to change the way they think.* Activities alone don't do that.

Leaders don't absolutely need to sponsor a specific program *per se*. It could be something as simple as a home evening group or a Sunday School class or a regular activity. The important aspect is a platform that will accomplish two objectives. First, the platform must outwardly attract those singles with habitual, defunct ways of thinking to participate. Second, the platform must help those same singles to adopt more effective ways of thinking. That help is best offered by ministering to each individual one by one.

If you're single and struggling with or about to struggle with the transition between YSA and SA groupings, what new types of thinking do you specifically need to adopt? I personally recommend two specific changes. First, you need to change the way you identify yourself. All ward members have a role to play here. And second, you need to change the way you think about interacting with other LDS singles. Leaders have a special role to play here.

To change the way you identify yourself, focus on the identity your covenants with God provides rather than the one our LDS subculture provides based on your marital status or your age. All of us adults in the Kingdom, regardless of marital status or age, have made the same covenants at baptism. Those of us who are endowed have also made the same covenants. By focusing your view of identity here, you combat the identity crisis many singles experience in transitioning out of the YSA grouping. You also foster a unity of the faith in which we all — singles and marrieds — can build Zion together.

Thinking of yourself more as an *active* Latter-day Saint and less as a *single* Latter-day Saint will also help you tremendously. But fellow ward members (especially the marrieds) have an equally important part to play. They must reject the LDS subcultural notion of temple marriage as a rite of passage. By not treating you differently because you haven't yet passed that point, they make it much easier for you to feel that sense of community a ward should provide. And they won't treat you differently if they focus the basis of their association with you on your identity from shared covenants rather than in marital status or age.

Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way everywhere. I've heard of some wards accepting a 20-something married person more than a 30-

something single. I've also learned about single fathers who were unaware of upcoming ward activities involving their children because that information was communicated only in Relief Society. I actually know a single sister who once struggled with choosing between attending a singles activity or fulfilling her Young Women calling. Whoever planned the calendar wasn't considering the needs of those who serve.

We've all heard stories about how talks and lessons geared toward marriage and family can make singles feel like second-class citizens in the Kingdom. The answer of course is not to avoid or detract from those topics but rather to address them with greater sensitivity. The best solution requires everyone to do his or her part. After all, we can't build Zion unless we do it *together*.

You also need to change the way you think about interacting with other LDS singles. We Americans tend to see our world in terms of generations. That's why we group history into decades. Throwing off this particular shackle of American culture and learning to see others as children of God rather than as members of different demographic groupings can provide tremendous assistance.

We also need to be more open and creative about developing interaction between the members of the YSA and SA groupings for those who need to transition. Complete segregation permits and very often fosters misunderstanding. A large part of the apprehension YSAs have in making the transition stems from assumptions which have no basis in reality. Getting to know SAs as real people before making the transition can help YSAs to replace false assumptions with true ones.

In this regard, those stakes which have adopted the Midsingles Program and have included YSAs in their late 20s are doing just this. But stakes which decide not to adopt anything Midsingles can still provide interaction between YSA and SA. Finding ways to work side by side in building Zion is an excellent way for YSAs to get to know SAs as real people.

Whatever the particulars of the adopted approach, personal relationships will ease the transition. They facilitate the changes in thinking needed by singles who transition out of the YSA grouping. And they can also provide a great support for SAs who need to see beyond themselves and their own pain by reaching out and developing relationships with others.

Now, I want to be very clear here. I'm *not* suggesting we allow both groups to mingle at dances. We don't need to support 40-something men to hit on 18-year-old women. What I *am* suggesting is that YSAs

who need to transition participate in a SA service project or other such activity focused on building the Kingdom. As singles of all ages work side by side, YSAs preparing for transition can interact with SA leaders and group members who can assist in building bridges of understanding. These realizations can help to ease the transition.

An excellent suggestion in this vein is temple work. Organizing a visit to perform temple baptisms provides a forum focused on the work of the Lord. As singles serve together, they will feel more united. Endowment sessions for those with temple recommends can potentially produce the same effect. Those feelings of unity can help with the transition.

Another way to develop those feelings comes from directly serving each other. Leaders can organize efforts in which transitioning YSAs and SAs directly serve each other. Such service helps to foster the sociality that all Latter-day Saints should ideally have with each other. As people build relationships with one another, they become more trusting and less apprehensive. That result cannot but help to ease the transition.

I remember one year in which we asked two YSA s to DJ for an upcoming SA conference. At first glance that idea might have you scratching your head. You might wonder just exactly how well that would work. It actually worked out far better than anyone imagined. The YSAs expanded their understanding of good music as they delved beyond their normal repertoire. The SAs enjoyed the expanded variety which was noticeably different. Because the YSAs volunteered their time and talents, the stake leadership saved hundreds of dollars that would have been spent to hire a professional DJ for the evening. Everyone won.

And everyone had a great time. Even the two YSA DJs joined the dance floor on occasion. The youthful vigor of their dance moves were a delight to watch and added to the ambiance that made the evening enjoyable for all. And the service they rendered helped them to see the SAs as real people.

So tear down that wall! We need to stop the madness created by the way we're thinking about ourselves and each other. And I want to roar it from the rooftops of the world in Walt-Whitman-like fashion. We need to replace the generational lenses, the categorical boxes, and the thinking that separates many of us with a view of each other as God sees us — as the brothers and sisters we truly are, regardless of age or generational needs. We're *all* children of God. And we all, single and married, need to come together and help each other on our eternal

journey home. Zion can be built in no other way.

Chapter 3

The Antidote is the Restored Gospel

“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!”

-Matthew 6:22-23

“But as it is written, . . . they that have not heard shall understand.”

-Romans 15:21

It’s one thing to understand the role of habits in how you’re designed to function. It’s quite another to correct those habits. The thought-reality process map provides real value here. It conveys not only an understanding of how habits can influence you but also how you can break less effective habits and replace them with more effective ones.

Nature abhors a vacuum, so you can’t replace something with nothing. If you attempt to do that, Nature will fill the emptiness with the default response. And your default response is always inertia, to keep on keeping on with your old habit. To increase the likelihood of success, you must replace something removed with something better.

In the case of habits, that means reformat and reboot — replace less effective habits with more effective ones. Otherwise, Nature will fill the vacuum it abhors with the default response. And you’ll go right back to where you were before and keep getting the results you’ve always had.

Of course, the most effective habits have foundation in the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. I’ve already alluded to some gospel principles in the previous pages. This chapter details more specifically how the restored gospel provides the most effective, positive habits that can replace your less effective, negative ones.

Watch your mouth

One of the first places to examine is what you take into yourself. Modern-day prophets and apostles have long counseled us to exercise care with the media we allow into our homes and lives. The thought-reality process map shows why. The books you read, the music you listen to, and the movies and videos you watch all provide you with images. These images in turn, according to the thought-reality process map, influence your emotions, your attitudes, and your actions. These

in turn lead to you to the experiences that provide you with the results that combine with meaning to make your reality.

If you want the most positive reality possible, make sure every element on the thought-reality process map is as positive as possible. While you don't control your images directly, you do control your exposure to the sources of those images. Make sure you align as much as possible the images you receive to the end reality you desire.

Jack Canfield, author of the popular *Chicken Soup for the Soul* book series, once described how his use of images helped to change his reality. While he was writing his first book, he obtained a copy of the *New York Times* bestseller list, scanned that copy into his computer, and then placed the title of his book into the Number 1 position. He placed several printed copies of this image around his office. Less than two years later, what before was no more than an image had become his reality. (You can access this story at <http://jackcanfield.com/visualize-and-affirm-your-desired-outcomes-a-step-by-step-guide/>.)

As powerful as images are (and they're very powerful), another element on the thought-reality process map holds even more power over how you feel. Your self-talk, or the collection of messages you give yourself, has been estimated to determine 95% of how you feel. Imagine that — 95%!

It's no coincidence that low self-esteem, a victim mentality, and a far-less-than-desirable reality attend those who constantly berate themselves. When you repeat anything long enough, you develop a habit. When you receive messages habitually, you come to believe those messages, whether they're true or not. That's just how you're built. So if you have a habit of providing yourself with negative self-talk, you'll believe those negative messages. Alternatively, you'll believe the positive messages you give yourself in a positive self-talk habit.

And here's some really great news. Because you have agency, you can choose what messages you tell yourself. I simply can't stress enough the importance of watching your self-talk. So powerful is this one element that small changes here can make *humongous* differences in your quality of life. If the messages you feed yourself habitually are inconsistent with the reality you desire, then you really need to focus your attention here.

The very first chapter of the Bible reveals the power behind your self-talk.

And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. . . .

And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters . . . and it was so. . . .

And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. . . .

And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. . . .

And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven . . . and it was so. . . .

And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.

And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good. . . .

And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. . . .

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. (Genesis 1:3–27, emphasis added)

If you missed the real power of these verses from Genesis 1, go back and read only the italicized portions. Let that message sink deep into you, because it holds a key you must turn if you want to turn your life into something more than it has been.

You are created in the image of God. You are His child. Nature teaches that every child has the potential to become as the parent. Thus, you have the potential to become even as God is. You may see evidence of that potential in your ability to create with words.

Now, admittedly, your power to create is but God's power to create in embryo form. But that power still comes from God, and that alone makes it powerful even in its underdeveloped state. Because it's in embryo form, you simply cannot speak something into existence by saying it once. You must speak it repeatedly, over and over — enough times, in fact, to create a habit.

Whatever self-talk habit you have will largely determine how you feel inside, depending on the type of energy it reinforces. If your self-talk habit reinforces negative energy, you become *powerless*. But if your self-talk habit reinforces positive energy, you become *powerful*.

The thought-reality process map demonstrates this power of self-talk. What you say to yourself determines 95% of your emotions, which in turn feed into your images, your attitudes, and your actions. These then yield the experiences that bring you results which combine with meaning to form your reality. Your focus becomes your reality. And you can choose the words you say to yourself that manage your focus. Like your Heavenly Father, you can speak words, and it will be so!

Many LDS singles give themselves defeatist messages. And because many don't understand the role of habits in their life, they keep themselves down with the messages they habitually feed themselves. But all LDS singles can rise above the challenges of singles life by adopting the habit of giving themselves empowering messages.

Consider for a moment the debilitating effect of these common messages:

- I can't.
- I'll never have the life I want.
- Nobody wants me.
- I'm so imperfect.
- I'm too weak to go on.
- Nobody cares about me.

Now contrast those messages with the power inherent in these words:

- I can.
- I will achieve the life I want.
- I am wonderful.
- I am worth something.

- I am so strong I'm unstoppable.
- God cares about me.

To quote the prophet Mormon, the difference “is as plain . . . as the daylight is from the dark night” (Moroni 7:15).

How do you change negative self-talk habits into positive ones? Nature abhors a vacuum, so you cannot replace something with nothing. To eliminate something, you must replace it with something else. Thus, whenever you notice yourself saying something even the least bit negative — or better yet, *about* to say something negative — stop yourself and say something positive.

If you can't think of anything positive to say, then here's something to consider. You can often create a good habit in this regard by saying the exact opposite of what you were about to say. Most people who have negative self-talk habits are training themselves to believe untruths about themselves. Saying the exact opposite by habit will fill you with truth and light.

Another approach towards a good self-talk habit is to select a phrase, a sentence, or a group of sentences that fills you with positive energy. The scriptures provide many such options. Here are just a *few* examples:

And God said, . . . and it was so (Genesis 1:9).

There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

Be strong and of a good courage (Joshua 1:5-6).

I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee (Job 42:2).

But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.

I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill . . . for the Lord sustained me (Psalms 3:3-5).

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever (Psalms 23:1-6).

But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint (Isaiah 40:31).

Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me.

Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me (Micah 7:7-8).

And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm (Matthew 8:26).

If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you (Matthew 17:20).

Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth (Mark 9:23).

If God be for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31)

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me (Philippians 4:13).

. . . I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them (1 Nephi

3:7).

And I said unto them: If God had commanded me to do all things I could do them. If he should command me that I should say unto this water, be thou earth, it should be earth; and if I should say it, it would be done (1 Nephi 17:50).

Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend (Mosiah 4:9).

Yea, I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things; yea, behold, many mighty miracles we have wrought in this land, for which we will praise his name forever (Alma 26:12).

And now remember, my son, that God has entrusted you with these things, which are sacred, which he has kept sacred, and also which he will keep and preserve for a wise purpose in him, that he may show forth his power unto future generations (Alma 37:14).

And he said: Surely God shall not suffer that we, who are despised because we take upon us the name of Christ, shall be trod-den down and destroyed, until we bring it upon us by our own transgressions (Alma 46:18).

Behold, I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I have been called of him to declare his word among his people, that they might have everlasting life (3 Nephi 5:13).

And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men 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).

And ye may know that he is, by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore I would exhort you that ye deny not the power of God; for he worketh by power, according to the faith of the children of men, the same today and tomorrow, and forever (Moroni 10:7).

Pick one of these passages or another passage that holds significant meaning for you and memorize it. Whenever you find yourself saying or about to say something negative to yourself, stop and repeat to yourself the scriptural passage you selected.

Whatever better habit you decide to adopt for yourself, if you perform it diligently, in time you'll replace your habit of negative self-talk with a habit of positive self-talk. And when you truly embrace a habit of positive self-talk, you *will feel* the difference.

You can use this technique to infuse any message into yourself. For instance, if you lack faith (and many LDS singles who've spent years unmarried do with respect to their future), memorize a scriptural passage that infuses faith and then constantly repeat to yourself that passage whenever you confront fear or doubt. The Lord declared He works so "that faith also might increase in the earth" (D&C 1:21). The scriptures are a great source of faith. You must align your thinking with the reality you want if you're ever to receive it. What better way to do that than with the scriptures?

His love is enough

This positive self-talk technique can help you to reformat other faulty habits. Positive self-talk can help you to reject a fixed mindset and the insidious cultural influence of "it". Accepting a correct idea of God's love helps us do this by supporting a growth mindset.

You don't need to prove yourself in order to be validated. You're *already* validated because the Savior died for *you*. When you accept that God's love is enough, you don't need to do or be anything more in order to have acceptance. He *already* accepts you. Repeating that message over and over to yourself through appropriate self-talk will infuse that truth into your soul.

LDS singles experience a plethora of completely unnecessary negative emotions. You don't need to throw an endless string of pity parties. You don't need to feel you have no hope of ever being loved. You don't need to feel forsaken or forgotten because you aren't "good enough." Replace your bad code with good code. Reformat and reboot

yourself.

Once you completely accept God's love, you'll realize you're already good enough. Christ wouldn't have suffered all He did for you if you weren't. But suffer He did. And He did it willingly because He loves you. The Atonement is the supreme proof His love is truly enough.

Thus, accepting God's love completely means accepting the Atonement completely. Once you do, you'll understand you don't need to prove yourself. You don't need to have that special someone in your life in order to be accepted. You're already accepted.

Some singles have trouble with this concept because they focus too much on that romantic love they don't have. In fact, you can focus so much on romantic love that you depreciate the divine love that heals all wounds. That divine love is readily available for you here and now.

Too many of us confuse our desires for love. We waste our time thinking we're pursuing a righteous desire to be loved. But in the end analysis we're spinning our wheels trying to be loved when in fact we're loved already. How ridiculous is that?

Please don't misunderstand me here. By no means do I discount romantic love. I simply advocate a sense of propriety. The greatest type of love is the love God has for you as His child. Feeling that love, therefore, should have your priority effort.

In most cases, it's not wrong to pursue romantic love. Everyone who's felt it knows how good it is. The problem comes when you consider something of lesser importance to be something of greater importance. Being able to feel God's love is infinitely worth more than feeling romantic love.

And so I ask you the same question which Alma asked the Nephites in Zarahemla: "And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, if ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?" (Alma 5:26). If you feel greater pining after romantic love than you do for God's love, something's not right.

Again, I'm not suggesting romantic love isn't great and expansive and wonderful. I'm merely affirming that God's love is so much more — more great, more expansive, and more wonderful. If you can't feel the greater love, what does that say about your priorities? What does that say about your focus? What does that say about how you see yourself and your world? What does that say about how you think?

It really is enough that God loves you. Once you fully accept that truth, you'll find yourself free in so many ways:

- You'll be free from the stress of trying to prove you're validated or acceptable. Because you don't have to prove yourself, you'll be free to be yourself.
- You'll be free from the preoccupation with experiencing a cultural rite of passage. When you know God's love is enough, you'll also know He'll help you to achieve your righteous desires as you follow Him and do what's truly needful for you.
- You'll be free to trust in His timing as well as in His promises. Because you know His love is enough, you also know He'll help you to fulfill your righteous desires in the way and time that's best for you.
- You'll be free to focus on improving upon yourself. Knowing God's love is enough clears your focus and allows you to concentrate on what in the end increases your likelihood of a temple marriage.
- You'll be free to enjoy more the life you have today. Knowing God's love is enough enables you to embrace the happiness God intended you to have all along throughout your life.
- You'll be free from fear. Knowing God's love is enough gives you strength to walk by faith. As great a price as He paid to redeem you, He could never ever abandon you. How can such love not be enough?

How do you accept that love? You simply open your heart and allow it to enter. The prophet Mormon taught,

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ (Moroni 7:48).

From this teaching we learn how to feel God's love. You simply pray to God for it with all your heart. Mormon adds that this same love is bestowed upon all true disciples of Jesus Christ. That means you don't need to "keep the standards" or play out the motions of what is expected of you to feel His love. In fact, you don't need to do anything

more than feel after Him in sincerity of heart. When that sole item is in place, God's love will penetrate your life. You'll know His love is indeed enough. I testify this is true.

In His image

The idea that we're created in God's image further rebuts the cultural notion of "it" and the fixed mindset. Yet God's image references more than the form of His body. God's image also comprises the spiritual power He projects.

To be created in His image means to have the capacity to project a similar spiritual power, in essence to become like He is. And that's a power we all can exercise here and now. We've already discussed the embryonic power you possess through self-talk to speak reality into being. Another aspect of that power finds expression in images.

We each have an image of God in our minds. When you think about God, what do you think about? Perhaps you think about one of His many attributes. You know He's kind, patient, trustworthy, just, merciful, and everything good. Now, imagine God facing the same trials and obstacles you face in your life right now. You can find strength in following that example you see in Him. This is how you can access the power found in His example.

Speaking of examples, you can use this same technique with Christ's image. Since Christ is the great Exemplar, the grand Prototype, you can and should use Him to guide you. For instance, LDS singles can find special strength in thinking about Christ as an unmarried man. We can debate later whether or not Christ was married in mortality. For now, just go with me for the purposes of this illustration.

Do you really think, if Christ were facing the very same challenges that you face today, He'd be a crippling clod of self-pity and depression? No? Why then do so many LDS singles consign themselves to that response? Some have even done it so often it's become a habit!

Because Christ is the great Exemplar, we know we can look to Him to show us how we should be. Understanding what being created in His image means gives us power to follow that example. Seeing that image gives us strength to exercise that power to follow His example. Seeing that image can give you power as well.

That power increases within you as you surrender yourself to love. By *love*, I'm not referencing romance but rather what the scriptures call *charity*. I prefer to use the word *love* to avoid the connotations of donating money and other resources to worthy causes. As needed as

those donations are, I want to bring a broader perspective to our discussion.

When you surrender to love, you don't think about what you do before you do it. You see an opportunity to act, you feel love prompting you to act, and you simply follow that prompting. By so doing, you embrace love and bring it into your heart. Those who do that are better positioned to feel God's love for them continually.

This is, I believe, what Mormon meant when he declared that God bestows His pure love on true followers of Jesus Christ. God will bestow His love on all who sincerely seek after it. But God especially bestows His love in the hearts of those who willingly surrender to love.

An elderly friend of mine once told me of a night when he was much younger. He awoke to hear his baby child crying. His first impulse was to check on the child to see what was wrong. But then he remembered an important presentation he had to give at work in the morning. And he recognized how tired he was. His next thought was to question why his wife couldn't support him by taking care of the child so he could rest.

In relating this story to me, my friend never told me how it ended. And out of respect, I never asked. But seeing in retrospect, he readily admitted his first impulse was the correct one. It was the one without an agenda, the one completely devoid of any self-interest. That is love.

You can describe love through its attributes (see 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 and Moroni 7:45-47). And you can sense when it's present and when it's not. But what you just can't do so easily is define what love *really* is. That's because love just is. Thus, surrendering to love means acting without agenda. You don't do what you do to gain any advantage. In fact, you don't have any real reason for doing what you do other than this: You're just following the path love indicates.

My friend would have surrendered to love if he followed his initial prompting. That road was a harder one to travel. My friend needed to perform well in his employment to provide for his family, and that meant getting sufficient sleep. But most roads devoid of agenda or self-interest are often more difficult to travel. And the more difficult travel often holds the more desirable rewards. Such is the road of love.

Again, I don't know what path my friend chose. He never told me, and I never asked. But I can tell you what path he chose in years that followed. Today my friend is greatly revered and respected as someone who loves people. He has helped many to feel loved, often during times when they greatly needed that support.

Of all the people I knew while living in that city, my friend often helped me to feel loved in moments when I felt no one else really cared.

He was able to do this because he acted without agenda. He simply followed the promptings love provided. And now late in his life the love of all those whose lives he has touched amply rewards him.

You don't need to think about it or "figure it out" to surrender to love. No thought process creates love. You don't will love into being or work at some program to produce it. Love just is. All you can do is choose to open yourself to it, to embrace it, and to follow the path it signals or choose the alternative.

No meditation or soul searching preceded the first impulse my friend experienced. He was simply presented with a situation, and love prompted him in a particular direction. His was the choice whether or not to follow it. That's because you don't will love into being. It just is.

To completely conquer the cultural notion of "it" and feel the totality of the love God has for you, you must surrender to love. That means acting without agenda. It also often means acting without concern for the consequences.

Too often, we refrain from following the Savior down the path of love because we're too concerned with how others will think about us or what they'll say or what difficult situation might arise for us from following that path. We far too often filter our choices based on considerations of personal consequence. And we do it out of habit.

For LDS singles, a common filter involves dating. For example, we often don't want to sit next to someone of the opposite gender who may need a friend. After all, we don't want to lead that person into thinking we have a romantic interest when none exists. But by withholding love we help that someone to feel more *un*loved than he or she already feels. And we send a clear message that says you have to be enticing romantically in order to be loved. That's not the path the Savior trod nor the one that love invites us to travel.

The Apostle Paul once wrote, "Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good" (Romans 12:9). In other words, we need to let go of whatever agenda encourages a focus on self. We need just to be what love wants us to be --- ministers to those around us without thought of what it may or may not mean for ourselves. We need to act in generosity towards one another, in the words of Paul, "without dissimulation." Only then will we truly adopt the Lord's image as our own.

Lean on me

Integrating other gospel principles into our lives can also prove

challenging. It can be hard to believe you have the ability to succeed, especially if you have a fixed mindset. If you've never experienced the type of success you want, you might find it difficult to imagine how that success could ever be yours. Extending yourself outside the realm of your known experience (what may be called walking by faith) is easier with a growth mindset. A fixed mindset will obstruct your progress, especially when your faith is weak or even lacking.

President Boyd K. Packer once shared a lesson he learned while seeking counsel from his leaders to address a problem he had.

Shortly after I was called as a General Authority, I went to Elder Harold B. Lee for counsel. He listened very carefully to my problem and suggested that I see President David O. McKay. President McKay counseled me as to the direction I should go. I was very willing to be obedient but saw no way possible for me to do as he counseled me to do.

I returned to Elder Lee and told him that I saw no way to move in the direction I was counseled to go. He said, "The trouble with you is you want to see the end from the beginning." I replied that I would like to see at least a step or two ahead. Then came the lesson of a lifetime: "You must learn to walk to the edge of the light, and then a few steps into the darkness; then the light will appear and show the way before you" ("Lesson 18: 'Be Strong and of a Good Courage', *Old Testament: Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual* (2001), p. 84).

Taking those steps out into the dark can be quite terrifying. That's why it's always comforting to have someone to lean on. We've all had times when we needed some external support to move forward. If you haven't, then you better buckle up, because your ride is probably going to get bumpy really soon.

You can lean on your friends when they're strong and you're weak, and they can lean on you when they're weak and you're strong. In like manner, you can increase your faith by leveraging what you already believe. By using a gospel principle in which you're strong, you can extend your faith into areas in which you're weak.

Let me give you an example from my own life. I've always had a strong testimony of tithing. And I've seen blessings come into my life because of my obedience to this principle. The Lord has proven Himself true to His word time after time after time, both in seasons of plenty and seasons of great want. Thus, I don't really have a problem believing the

Lord when He gives promises with respect to tithing. I've no doubt His promised blessings will follow my obedience to that principle.

At the same time, I haven't always believed the Lord's promises about my eternal companion. In my patriarchal blessing, He promises I'll receive my eternal companion in this life. Yet year after year I've been just as single as when I came home from my mission. Eventually I began to think maybe some of His promises to me weren't true.

But what sense does that make? How can He be true in one area and not another? How can His word stand in one regard and not another? No, in order for Him to be God, He must be trustworthy in *all* things.

In time I came to understand how I could begin to believe Him in all things. I needed to leverage areas in which my trust was strong to increase my faith in areas in which my trust was weak. I never doubted Him when the question was about tithing, so why couldn't I believe Him when the question concerned my eternal companion? Why could I not simply take Him at His word?

This exercise helped me to understand I was believing the Lord selectively. It was easy for me to believe Him about tithing. I've had many experiences with tithing in which He has proven Himself again and again. Yet looking at my experiences with dating, I once struggled to believe anyone that captured my interest would find me just as interesting. By relying on my faith in an area of strength, I could extend myself into belief in an area of weakness just enough to trust Him. And it was only after I believed that I began having the experiences that moved me closer to my eternal blessings.

If you examine yourself and find you too are believing Him selectively, then open your heart and begin believing Him in all things. Once you let go of your disbelief, "trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5), you'll find yourself starting to feel better about everything in your life.

There is always hope

Many LDS singles think all hope is lost when they don't see any obvious opportunities for the marriage they desire. Fundamentally, their lack of hope is no different from anyone else with righteous desires that appear difficult if not impossible to fulfill. Some married couples want to have biological children, but they can't. Some want to live closer to wayward family members in order to provide a greater gospel influence, but they can't. Some want to attend the temple more frequently, but given their situation they can't.

Yet in all cases hope abounds. No matter how dark or bleak your circumstances may appear, you always have reason to hope. There is always hope because there is always Christ.

Almost all of us believe very readily in miracles Christ performed among a people most of us don't know in a far-away land most of us haven't seen. Yet when it comes to believing in miracles performed in our own lives and in our own backyard, we respond very slowly if at all. We need to open our hearts and start believing Him in everything. And we need to do this habitually.

Many wrongs fill this life. Knowing God has apportioned a time in which all wrongs will be righted can make it easier to be patient when things you don't want to happen do in fact happen. Knowing a just God will not wait to right our wrongs when the time to right them is right also encourages patience. There is always hope because there is always Christ.

Of course, understanding those truths doesn't always appease the longing that pains the heart in the here and now. Because your focus determines your reality, you'll have a reality filled with pain when you focus on your pains. Focus instead on the Savior so that He becomes your reality.

Christ didn't teach that all of His promised blessings would be available only in the next life. Nor did He teach that His promised blessings would be distributed like lunch on a buffet table — first come are first served and everyone else will just have to wait. He wants *all* of us to enjoy *all* of His promised blessings. That means you.

Because you're unique in personality and demeanor, so also are the gifts you've been given. Some may appear to have more than you have. But just as in the parable of the talents, all those who improve upon what they've been given, whatever that original amount may be, will be received into the joy of the Lord. That joy can fill you in the here and now as well as in times to come. There is always hope because there is always Christ.

In addition, we find each other at different points in our life journey. If you look around, you'll see some are ahead of you and some are behind you in terms of spiritual progression. Christ wants all of His children to enjoy all of the blessings He has promised to the faithful. Yet some of the faithful, because of where they are in their life journey, may not be ready for some of those blessings.

In the case of marriage, both parties must be ready in order for the arrangement to bring a fulness of joy into the lives of both parties. If you're yearning for that special someone and wonder why you don't

have the blessing you desire, maybe you're not ready. Maybe your companion isn't ready. Or perhaps the time is right for both of you and you simply need to get busy doing the right things. In any of these cases, Christ can help you. There is always hope because there is always Christ.

If you're seeing with no more than your physical eyes, then ultimately you'll have no hope. You can look around and not physically see the means to achieve what you desire. Even here, there is always hope because there is always Christ.

Christ can help you to see with spiritual eyes. He can help you to see what is there but not seen with physical eyes. Because of the way you habitually see your world, you may not recognize what you want standing right in front of you. Christ can also help you to see what is not now in existence because it has yet to be created. What you desire may be something He creates for you. Or it could be something you have yet to create for yourself. In all cases, Christ will help you do whatever is needful for you to receive all of the blessings which He desires to give to you. There is always hope because there is always Christ.

He will help you to let go

When you exercise faith in Him, Christ will help you to gain what you need and don't have. This idea supports the growth mindset. But Christ will also help you to let go of what you have and don't need. He once taught that a house divided against itself cannot stand (Matthew 12:25; Mark 3:25; Luke 11:17). He also taught "no man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24).

When you let go of what you have but don't need, the Savior can better help you to have what you need but don't have. In this effort you're not alone. The Lord will help you to let go of whatever holds you back from enjoying life and achieving your full potential.

In my experience, the best way to access that help is to surrender to love. The more that love fills your heart, the greater the spiritual power you'll feel in your life. You'll also have more patience as the Lord works a miracle for you. This is because God is love (1 John 4:8). The more love fills you, the more like Him you become. And the more like Him you become, the greater your ability to overcome the world as the Son of God did.

Self-talk, as we've already discussed, is another great tool. You can

and do choose the messages you give yourself. That being the case, choose to fill yourself with messages of strength. Solidly affirm your ability to overcome all things through Christ. Give yourself permission to use the power within you to let go.

You *can* conquer your personal challenges, whatever they may be. Let go of what you don't need and surrender to love. You'll find your connection to God really is the most important connection you can have, especially as you seek to connect with other people in every area of your life.

The Spirit makes you what?

Elder Parley P. Pratt has been revered by Latter-day Saints ever since the early days of the Church. Of all his writings and teachings, the one that applies most to LDS singles today may be this:

The gift of the Holy Ghost quickens all the intellectual faculties, increases, enlarges, expands, and purifies all the natural passions and affections, and adapts them, by the gift of wisdom, to their lawful use. It inspires, develops, cultivates and matures all the fine-toned sympathies, joys, tastes, kindred feelings, and affections of our nature. It inspires virtue, kindness, goodness, tenderness, gentleness, and charity. It develops beauty of person, form and features. It tends to health, vigor, animation, and social feeling. It invigorates all the faculties of the physical and intellectual man. It strengthens and gives tone to the nerves. In short, it is, as it were, marrow to the bone, joy to the heart, light to the eyes, music to the ears, and life to the whole being. (*Key to the Science of Theology*, p. 61)

For those living in the 21st century, here's the translation: The Spirit makes you sexy.

I can hear what some of you are saying just now. *The Spirit makes you what?* If you don't believe me, then read what he said again. And don't get hung up where he says the Spirit inspires virtue. Sex itself isn't bad. Sex is good. Taking sex outside the bounds the Lord has established is what's bad. Elder Pratt clearly supports this idea when he says the Spirit "purifies all the natural passions and affections, and adapts them, by the gift of wisdom, to their lawful use." And what about "it develops beauty of person, form and features"?

Consider these thoughts as you re-read the quote from Elder Pratt.

Don't worry. I'll wait right here for you until you get back.

How does this quote from Elder Pratt apply to LDS singles? Many believe they need to be a sex god or goddess in order to achieve a happy marriage. Indeed, the world believes the only meaningful basis for any type of couple association is physical attraction that leads to sex. The world bases its standard of attractiveness in a companion almost exclusively on physicality. Yet the Spirit can help you to adopt the true standard.

Please understand I'm not saying you shouldn't include physical attraction in your considerations for an eternal companion. It just shouldn't dominate your considerations. Its true role is actually rather minor.

The emotional high commonly called "love" or infatuation or even sometimes romance is really nothing more than biochemistry. You feel elated, like you're walking on clouds and the world's so right it could never go wrong. You're "in love" with someone special.

What you don't see (and maybe even don't know) is that you're experiencing the effects of hormones interacting with your brain cells. It's just a chemical reaction in your head. Sorry to burst your balloon, but although it feels very real, the emotional high of being "in love" is part illusion.

I know that sounds incredibly unromantic. It also sounds surprising coming from a guy who owns and watches multiple film versions of *Pride and Prejudice*. But I've reached a point in my life where I want real. And the older I get the more I believe you can create romance when both parties simply agree to embrace it. Like love, romance — *real* romance — is more a conscious choice than a hormonal high.

In addition, true love — the type of love that endures to inspire generations — is more something into which you grow rather than fall. Hormones feel great when your glands infuse them into your blood stream. Nevertheless, however great they feel, the resulting emotional highs are *never* permanent.

The love that is permanent — the love intended to be enshrined for eternity by the sealing power of the Priesthood — isn't created or willed into existence; it just is. You surrender to love when you build relationships in the same way your understanding of spiritual things is built, that is, line upon line, precept upon precept (see Isaiah 28:10-13; 2 Nephi 28:30; D&C 98:12; D&C 128:21). Time and time again, you simply choose the path of love.

This is why it's important to make surrendering to love a habit. The unconditional deposits you make into the emotional bank account of

your significant other constructs the edifice of love in which lasting and joyful marriages reside. All in all, love is a choice.

But hold on, I hear some of you saying. You're not really saying we should just ignore our hormones, are you? How can we ignore or even help the way we are? How can we be married for all eternity with someone who doesn't make us feel alive?

Yes, it's true you were built for sex. It's part of God's plan for His children. The biochemistry associated with sex helps to ensure His plan continues even when people don't know about the plan.

At the same time, the emotional high called "love" is simply nothing more than biochemistry. That means that you can reproduce it by putting the right elements together under the right conditions, just like any other chemical reaction. Those actions you can choose to perform.

When you make the right choices to have the Spirit with you, that influence can change how you view others. It extends to how others view you. The Spirit can even refine their desires just as it can yours.

The world would have you believe that sex is about having the right physical dimensions or satisfying a physical urge and nothing else. In reality, sex is multi-dimensional. It's not just physical but mental, emotional, and spiritual as well. Truly understood, sex is more about communication and connecting with your spouse in each of its multiple dimensions than it is about physical proportions.

When you have the Spirit with you, you can understand better the particulars of your own situation. Having the Spirit with you also helps you to see things in perspective. It can help others in your life to do the same.

I recall a day back in my college years when a recently released sister missionary returned to one of my student wards where she'd served. She had returned to visit with friends now that mission rules no longer bound her. The really remarkable thing about the group that surrounded her was that the majority were guys.

To understand how remarkable that is, you need to understand a few things about this sister. She wasn't what the world would call attractive. She was something of a pretzel stick: uncommonly short, thin, and not very shapely. Her face was rather plain. In many ways she resembled a child more than an adult. She had none of the physical attributes the world would have us believe are essential for an exciting romantic relationship. And yet every guy in that group *wanted* her.

How can this be? Simple. The Spirit makes you sexy. This returned missionary was so full with the Spirit that everyone around her felt that influence. Just as Elder Pratt declared well over a century earlier, the

Spirit refined our desires (speaking as one of the male contingency in that group) so that our attractions were purified. We all wanted to be around her and to get to know her in ways that we couldn't while she was a full-time missionary.

The world believes sex is enjoyable only when the physical senses are heightened. But the Spirit can help you to understand sexuality in each of its aspects: the physical, mental, emotional, *and* spiritual. The Spirit can help you to understand how each of those aspects serves to heighten and strengthen the others.

The Spirit also refines you, inspiring you to make deposits of love that will be most meaningful to your companion, both in and out of the bedroom. Surrendering to love by making those deposits without any concern for self or any agenda will invite your companion to return that love to you. When each partner continually seeks to make the other partner happy, they together create a deep and abiding mutual attraction. That attraction, created by choices they made in following the Spirit, has center stage when it's time for sex. Thus, "neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 11:11).

Satan wants you to get discouraged when you don't measure up to the world's standard. What you really need is the Spirit to point you to the true standard — Jesus Christ. Satan wants you to abandon all hope when you see little or no opportunity to achieve your righteous goals. What you need is the Spirit to enlighten your mind so that you see opportunities you couldn't see before. The Spirit can help you to understand which of your ways of thinking need to be changed in order to access better those previously unseen opportunities.

The Spirit can transform not just you but also those around you. He can help others to see you in a way that will provide the opportunity you seek. And let's get real. Someone who'll respond to the refining influence of the Spirit is the type of person you really want to marry anyway.

So, no, I'm not saying you should ignore your hormones, just that everything has its place. Consider President Ezra Taft Benson's counsel:

Of course, she [or he] should be attractive to you, but do not just date one girl [or guy] after another for the sole pleasure of dating without seeking the Lord's confirmation in your choice of your eternal companion. ("To the Single Adult Brethren of the Church", April 1988.)

I'm saying much the same thing, just in different words. Of course you should want to want your companion. Just be sure to take a more holistic perspective when making decisions about dating. The Spirit can transform and refine not only your sensibilities but that of your companion as well.

Love is a choice because love fills you only when you surrender to it. The strength of the love you feel for your spouse will increase over time in proportion to the sacrifices you choose to make for your chosen companion. The Spirit can help you to understand the choices you need to make along your own individual journey.

Love and the Spirit actually have a symbiotic relationship in that they feed one another. Surrendering to love encourages the Spirit to be with you, and the Spirit will encourage you to surrender to love. Thus, if the Spirit makes you sexy, so will surrendering to love.

Life is a journey

In addition, the Spirit can remind you of gospel truths that will comfort you in times of need. Repeating truths you receive via the Spirit through self-talk can be extremely powerful. Among those gospel truths are these healing balms: You're not in mortality based on happenstance or chance. You are here with purpose.

LDS singles can become so focused on getting married that they fail to see the bigger picture. Life is a journey. This mortal life is a part of a more eternal journey, just as searching for a companion in this life is a part of the journey in mortality. Yet ultimately if you "press forward, feasting upon the words of Christ" (2 Nephi 31:20), you can endure to the end and receive "all that [the] Father hath" (D&C 84:36-38). Returning to the thought-reality process map, "feasting upon the words of Christ" must include incorporating the words of the Master into our assumptions, self-talk, and images as part of a conscious choice to adopt better ways of thinking.

For example, that phrase *endure to the end* was never meant to describe misery. You can find joy in every stage of your journey. You had joy before you entered this life. And you have much joy to look forward to after you leave this life (provided of course you remain true to the truth you have). Why should this life offer anything less?

If you're miserable now, it's because you have chosen to be so. The natural man provides the propensity to blame others for one's misfortunes. Too often we quickly ascribe *our* unhappiness in life to the choices *others* make. This condition results from incorrect thinking, as

shown in the thought-reality process map.

Life is not about where you've been; it's about where you're going. Nor is it about what happens to you; it's about how you choose to respond. When you properly align your thinking, natural law declares you *will* have the corresponding reality. That's the truth projected in the thought-reality process map.

Please don't misunderstand me. I'm certainly not saying it's easy. Most of us are still works in progress. I know I'm definitely a walking construction zone. But when you strive enough to become perfected in love, you actually can be happy irrespective of what others choose to say or do. Remember, 95% of your emotions come from self-talk, and you have total control over that.

Sadly, many of us entertain less effective habits. For example, far too many LDS singles play the victim. They approach life as though it was something entirely of someone else's making. They act as though their unhappy circumstances aren't really connected with the choices they've made. These are false assumptions which will continue to breed misery and despair unless, per the thought-reality process map, they improve their thinking.

The victim mentality often finds expression when singles use the choices of others to explain why they're single. But that's not really why they're single. If you don't believe that, here's a dose of pure truth: Until you own your life, you'll never be free of the limitations you impose upon yourself with faulty ways of thinking. Owning your life means facing the truth and accepting responsibility for how your life has resulted. The victim mentality is a huge faulty way of thinking.

It can't be any other way. Look at the thought-reality process map. Your focus determines your reality. The thoughts you consistently had have led you to the life you now have. It's natural law. It's how you and the universe were designed to operate. You'll never be free if you run from the truth. The truth can make you free only when you face it and embrace it.

Consistent with freeing yourself by facing the truth is the adoption of *all* truth as you encounter it. You should live *all* of the gospel that you can with *all* of your heart. How else can you expect to have *all* the joy and hope the gospel offers?

In the end analysis, those who seek the Lord will find Him. And those who find Him will be given everything they need to believe Him and His promises in all things. As the prophet Isaiah wrote,

THE Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD

hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;

To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;

To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified. (Isaiah 61:1-3)

The Law of the Harvest

I love the 2003 film *Secondhand Lions*. One of my favorite scenes shows young Walter and his two aged uncles Hub and Garth hoeing in the garden. Garth starts to imagine how good all the vegetables will taste once they're ready to eat.

Then Walter vocally observes that two of the rows look alike. Hub begins to investigate, examining each row of the garden plot. The three characters find all of the rows growing the exact same thing: corn! Hub mocks his brother, and in reply Garth says, "Well, that seed salesman sure saw us comin'."

"No," corrects Hub. "He saw you comin'!"

This scene provides a humorous demonstration of one of the most fundamental of the natural laws governing our world — the Law of the Harvest. In short, you reap what you sow. Because the McCann brothers sowed only corn, they harvested only corn. It didn't matter they *thought* they were sowing peas, carrots, Chinese cabbage, and a host of other vegetables. The Law of the Harvest says we all reap what we sow. And they did.

And so will you. You'll reap what you sow in your life. Thus, when your harvest isn't what you expect, you shouldn't, for instance, condemn others for selling you the wrong seeds. Instead, focus on your efforts and try again, making sure the seeds you plant will reap the harvest you want.

Own your life. Instead of blaming someone else for selling you the wrong seeds, accept responsibility that you bought the wrong seeds. Instead of blaming yourself for not knowing how to garden, accept responsibility to learn what you need to learn to get where you want to go. Instead of cursing the ground for not producing, do what you must to make the soil more nourishing for your seeds. These attitudes of

accepting responsibility rather than passing blame align with both the growth mindset and owning your life.

Nature is *always* strict in the enforcement of her laws. That means you can't reap unless you first sow. You cannot receive unless you first give. Too many LDS singles expect others to love them without first giving love to others. That's not the way it works. Nature won't let you have it that way.

First you sow, *then* you reap. For everything you could want in life, there is a price you must pay. You must pay your price in full and in advance. Otherwise, you don't get what you want. First you sow. Then you reap.

The price you must pay means you shouldn't compare yourself with others when trying to determine how to get the results you want. The same seeds planted in different fields might not yield the same harvest. Something that worked well for someone else might not work well for you. Your harvest depends on other factors in addition to the seed, such as the quality of the soil and how much nurturing is received between sowing and reaping.

That's why the best way to respect the Law of the Harvest when seeking the life you want is to evaluate what does and doesn't work for you. Too many LDS singles needlessly feel discouraged when they see something that works for someone else fail them. Their problem lies in making an unfair comparison. To reap the harvest you desire, plant the proper seed *and* adjust your approach to nurturing that seed respective to the nature of *your* particular field. You must pay *your* price to reap.

That's great, I know some of you are undoubtedly thinking right now. If I want to reap the harvest of marriage, I just need to sow the seeds for the marriage I want. Now all I need to do is to figure out what those seeds are, right?

Yes and no. Because marriage is an event which depends upon the agency of another individual, you can't really plan for it to happen on a given day. But you can do things to encourage it to happen within a given, larger time frame.

The journey to marriage is not causal but correlative. We aren't making waffles here. It's not a question of mixing the right ingredients together, pouring some batter into an iron, and then waiting for the little light to tell you it's ready. It's a question of working to make yourself more attractive, seeking and taking advantage of opportunities, learning from mistakes and failures, and trying again and again.

It's what I call the shampoo routine: lather, rinse, repeat. No mechanism exists that *directly* connects what you do to what you get in dating. The arrows that cross over the boundary of Your World in the

thought-reality process map are influential and not determinative.

Because the agency of another person is involved, what you do is *indirectly* connected to what you get. It's entirely possible you can do your part and still not get what you want. However, the better you play your part, the more probable getting what you want becomes.

Even here the Law of the Harvest still works. If you don't do your part, you definitely won't be happily married. You do have to do your part. Because you don't control someone else's decision to their part, you have to do the best you can do until that happens. Again, the process is correlative, not causal.

In all of this, one thing is certain. Your focus determines your reality. If you align your thoughts correctly, then sooner or later the corresponding reality must come to you. The right way to think about the road to marriage is as a correlative process and not a causal one. When you attune your thinking to that truth, your actions align with the indirect approach that increases your probability of success. The better your alignment with the right approach, the higher your probability of success.

Elder John K. Carmack of the Seventy provides some assistance on this point. He said,

While temple marriage and family life would be my ultimate goal, whether in this life or beyond, I would be careful not to make it my central focus. Marriage is more likely to come naturally from living life fully than by a direct and pointed campaign to achieve that long-range goal. ("To My Single Friends", *Ensign*, March 1989)

He then continues by explaining what C. S. Lewis once said about good health. You can easily become a health nut if you make health your direct objective. But you're more likely to obtain health if you focus on other related aspects such as enjoying nourishing food, regular exercise, and fresh air.

This is exactly what the correlative nature of marriage means. It's not causal in that you do A which results in B. It's more like you do A which encourages B. If you aren't married and want to be, consider what you're doing to *encourage* it rather than *produce* it. How balanced is your life? How many good things fill your life?

Many LDS singles pine after someone with whom to share their life. But most never stop to question what exactly it is about their lives that makes them worth sharing. If you want someone to share your life with

you, you need to ask yourself these questions: How enticing is your life? What are you doing to improve upon yourself? And are your habits helping or hindering you in that effort? You can change those things, because you decide what fills your life and what habits you have.

Surrendering to love is a great way to kill many of those proverbial birds with a single stone. What could be worth sharing more than love? And here's a great bonus: Surrendering to love will fill you with strength and fortitude in the interim before marriage, however long that interim may be. Surrendering to love really is one of the best habits you can have.

As Elder Carmack counseled, pursuing after marriage directly will work against you. It may sound counterintuitive, but the relationship between your efforts and your results in the dating journey is correlative, not causal.

This most certainly doesn't mean you should just be active in the Church and then hope for the best. That doesn't really work. Trust me, after years of trying that, I know. Nor does it mean you shouldn't make plans for the future. It just means you should focus on what you can control, enjoy living in the moment, and have faith the Lord will guide you to where you need to be when you need to be there.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks has taught,

The timing of marriage is perhaps the best example of an extremely important event in our lives that is almost impossible to plan. Like other important mortal events that depend on the agency of others or the will and timing of the Lord, marriage cannot be anticipated or planned with certainty. We can and should work for and pray for our righteous desires, but despite this, many will remain single well beyond their desired time for marriage. . . .

[However,] the commitments and service of adult singles can anchor them through the difficult years of waiting for the right time and the right person. Their commitments and service can also inspire and strengthen others. Wise are those who make this commitment: I will put the Lord first in my life, and I will keep His commandments. The performance of that commitment is within everyone's control. We can fulfill that commitment without regard to what others decide to do, and that commitment will anchor us no matter what timing the Lord directs for the most important events in our lives. ("Timing", *Ensign*, October 2003)

I used to think Elder Oaks was implying if things weren't working out for me then the time for marriage must not be right. Many of us think that way. I would then struggle with patience as I waited for that "right time."

As I look back upon those years, I see now the time was right for me, and not just once but rather over and over again. The Lord provided me with plenty of opportunities. But because my thinking wasn't properly aligned, I wasn't sowing the right seed when it was time to sow. True to the Law of the Harvest, I then never reaped the harvest I desired. I was like the McCann brothers, thinking I was planting all sorts of different vegetables when in fact I was planting only corn.

The relationship between what you do and what you get in your journey to marriage is correlative in nature. But you still have much within your power that can tip the scales in your favor. So of course you should do what you can. As Elder Oakes said, we "can and should work for and pray for our righteous desires."

Understanding the role of habits in your life, the various influences upon your habits, and how the gospel provides the best habits is but a first step in that direction. True to the law of the harvest, your choices can influence the choices of others to yield a bountiful life that will give you joy now and for years to come. But those choices all depend on having the right way of thinking.

Because old habits die hard, adopting more effective patterns of thought requires diligence and persistence. The Spirit can point you in the right direction and strengthen you to pursue it. But ultimately the choice is yours. And without any conscious choice on your part, your default option will always be to play out your established habits.

We're all designed to have habits, so here then is the question: Will your habits produce the results you want? If not, replace those ineffective habits with more effective ones. Make the changes you need to make so the habits you do have will bring you to the life you want. Reformat and reboot yourself. Consciously choose to make your life phenomenal.

