

## What Do We Treasure?

**Hi, my name is Jeffrey.** Thank you for that wonderful introduction, and I want to start with a question:

### What do we treasure?

The answer to this question changes everything.

Imagine an archaeologist and a treasure hunter both opening the same ancient tomb.

They're going to see completely different things. One person is going to see artifacts that illuminate history, and the other is going to see sparkling gems and gold to profit from.

### What we treasure determines what we see.

Or, as President O explained, *what we see around us depends on what we seek in life.*

## The Power of Worldviews

Today, I am talking about worldviews.

At their core, worldviews are **value systems**. There is no such thing as a view of the world that is not filtered through our values.

Our core values **change our vantage point**, which again **changes what we see**.

And when we value most what **God values most**, we are in the best vantage point to see and measure our lives **the way God sees and measures our lives**.

Look, today we're going to talk about four different worldviews, and I'm going to describe each of these as a **gospel**.

### What Is the Gospel?

This is because each worldview defines **human flourishing** or *the good life* a little bit differently, and thus what we think of as the **end, goal, or purpose of living the gospel**.

The term *gospel* means **good news**.

So, in other words, the question is: **What do we treat as good news?**

### The Expressive Gospel

The *expressive gospel* treats **self-expression** and **personal authenticity** as the highest prize towards which we strive.

It emphasizes the importance of **being ourselves**, rather than being pushed into—so, um—into molds or social templates.

We want to be accepted by others **for who we are**, to be able to live out our unique **priorities, desires, and eccentricities**.

We wrap our self-concept around what makes us **different**, and then all the other features of the worldview fall into place.

### **Non-Conformity and the Expressive Gospel**

If our chief goal is to be ourselves then, um, well, any Community Norm that prescribes a certain life path becomes a **stumbling block**.

In the *expressive gospel*, the **rebels of the community** are often the protagonists of the story, and the **villains** are anyone who reinforces **Community Norms**.

**Non-conformity** is the key to the good life, which is achieved by **becoming your true self**. And when the community celebrates you for who you are, the Prosperity Gospel comes in a variety of flavors.

### **The Prosperity Gospel**

When within this world viiew, sometimes **the good life** is found in **comfortable living** and, um, in **material possessions**.

Living a **middle class lifestyle or above**, with plenty of **Leisure Time**, freedom from unwanted responsibilities.

Other times **the good life** is found in **professional success**.

The **conflict of the story** then centers on our **struggle to be noticed and the threat of obscurity**:

- *As an aspiring musician, will I get noticed by the top record labels?*
- *As an aspiring writer, will one of my books become a bestseller?*

I think Latterday Saints sometimes put our own spin on the **Prosperity Gospel**.

We treat **life benchmarks and Milestones**, such as **serving a mission** or, um, **getting married**, **having children**, **CH serving in church callings of escalating importance**, um, as **measures of success in gospel living**.

We might talk, for example, about how **paying tithing insulates us from financial hardship** or how **living the Word of Wisdom grants us Health and Longevity**.

### **The Therapeutic Gospel**

The *therapeutic gospel* treats **personal fulfillment** as **this, this** and the satisfaction of our **personal needs**, um, as **our greatest treasure**.

The psychologist **Abraham mlo** believed that **human suffering** stems largely from **unmet personal needs**.

He—he—believed that our needs can be organized **Loosely into a hierarchy**:

1. **Basic needs** – such as **food and water** (at the bottom).
2. **Safety needs** – such as **freedom from physical and social aggression**.

3. **Love and belonging** – which includes **a place to call home and intimate companionship**.
4. **Esteem** – which includes **the need to feel important in and valued by our community**.

And in this worldview story, **the protagonist of the story seeks personal fulfillment**.

### **The Therapeutic Gospel and Personal Fulfillment**

That is the **fulfillment of personal needs**.

The term *fulfillment* used in this way grew in popularity as **Maslow's ideas** filtered into our broader culture.

The *therapeutic gospel* offers us **a vision of what is wrong with us and the world**. We face **emotional deficiencies** and the traumas of **rejection, loneliness, insecurity**.

We become **emotionally malnourished** for the lack of:

- **Emotional safety**
- **Esteem**
- **Physical intimacy**
- **Community connection**

### **The Redemptive Gospel**

And then last, we have the *Redemptive gospel*, which treats **reconciling with God as our greatest treasure**.

In this worldview, our **greatest desire** is:

- **To return and live with God**
- **To eventually become like Him in character and virtue**
- **To enjoy that divine presence**
- **To take on those Divine characteristics and Christlike virtues**

The **gift of the Holy Ghost**, I believe, represents **God's presence in our life**—that reconciliation with God.

The **fruits and the gifts of the Spirit** represent **His Redemptive work in our hearts**—that is, **transformation in His image**.

### **The Chasm Between Us and God**

In this story, what stands in the way?

Well, we've all been **alienated from God** through **sin and temptation**, through—through **pride, enmity, weakness, and rebellion**.

The more we **aspire to the presence and divine nature of God**, the more we recognize **the chasm that separates us from Him**, which we **cannot cross ourselves**.

And so, we **seek reconciliation with God** through the **merits and grace of Jesus Christ**.

We **take upon ourselves the name of Christ** by:

- **Making and keeping covenants with God**
- **Participating in sacred ordinances**

### **Which Values Do We Elevate?**

So, we have here **four different worldviews**.

The question is: **Which of these values do we elevate as our greatest treasure?**

Which **floats to the top** of our stack of priorities?

In other words, **which of these are the subplots of the story, and which are the main plot?**

### **How Core Values Shape Our Story**

Each **core value** shapes every other aspect of our story, including what we consider to be **the obstacles in the way**, our **greatest disappointments in life**, the **heroes and the villains** of the story, and what **the happy ending** of our story looks like.

### **Why Does This Matter?**

And so, why—why is this all important? Let me illustrate with an example.

Someone I know, who is close to me, has faced a **devastating illness** that has kept her from serving a mission, graduating from college, marrying, or pursuing a career. All of her various **life subplots** have been **interrupted** for now two decades. Some months, her **benchmark for daily success** involved getting out of bed, making breakfast, and tidying her room—and many times, even that is **too much to ask**.

One day, in a moment of **depression**, she asked me:

**Why is the gospel not working for me?**

### **What This Question Presumes**

Note what this question presumes **as the purpose of gospel living**.

If we embrace **the Prosperity Gospel**, when **circumstance turns against us**, we might conclude that **we are broken** in some way, that our **best efforts at living the gospel just aren't good enough**, or we might treat it as **a failure external to us** and conclude:

**"The Gospel of Jesus Christ isn't working for me."**

When we consider—when we wonder if the gospel has failed us because we've **missed milestones** such as graduation, serving a mission, employment, marriage, children, or retirement, we might have **supplanted the gospel story with a Prosperity-based counterfeit**.

## **The Redemptive Gospel of Jesus Christ**

In contrast, in the **Redemptive Gospel of Jesus Christ**, our **greatest priority** is **reconciling with God** and **overcoming the Fall**. This involves **moral transformation in the image of Christ**, becoming **new creatures in Christ**.

Unlike the **plot-driven story** of the *Prosperity Gospel*, the *Redemptive Gospel* is a **character-driven story**. The focus is **not on the events that happen to us**, but on **who we become in the process**.

We **succeed in gospel living** as our **character changes** through **repentance, covenant keeping, and receiving the fruits and gifts of the Spirit**.

And so, when my loved one asked, "**Why is the gospel not working for me?**" my response was, and still is:

**"You are more Christlike because of the way you have endured these hardships."**

## **The Gospel Works for Everyone**

Faithfully keeping your covenants and seeking the fruits of the Spirit, **the gospel is working for you**.

If I could convince her of one thing, it is that **her success in life is not contingent on how brightly she shines in any of her professional pursuits**, or even whether she can do anything more than get dressed on a given day. If that is all she can do, it is measured by the kind of person she's becoming in the process.

The gospel, understood this way, **works for everyone**. It works for **the same-sex attracted, for those with chronic illness, for the unemployed, the infertile, those who are grieving, those who feel like their talents are underutilized**.

All can enjoy the **gifts of the Spirit**, become **sanctified**, and become **holy as people**.

When the **Redemptive worldview** is the **main plot** of our lives, **life's various subplots can be interrupted**, and the **main story can still be reconciliation with God through Christ and feasting on the fruits and gifts of the Spirit**.

This **character-driven story** is **never derailed by the vicissitudes of life**.

## **A Challenge to This Perspective**

Um, let me share another example.

Someone just recently pushed back on some of these ideas in an email to me with the rejoinder:

**"What's better? To have an unhappy person living Church standards or to have someone living happily while not following all of them?"**

He expressed, essentially, **the view that gospel standards do not bring fulfillment to everyone**, but that **everyone needs fulfillment**.

And so, some must seek that **fulfillment—in his view—outside the Church and its teachings**, and that **we should not try to stop them because that fulfillment is what life is all about**.

"**We're here to be happy, aren't we?**" was another part of his email.

### **The Assumption of Maslow's Hierarchy**

Um, Abraham Maslow's hierarchy is the most popular version of **what this fulfillment looks like**, and I think that most people take for granted **the premises of this hierarchy**.

And they—I think many of us—**assume that esteem, belonging, and other forms of self-fulfillment are essential ingredients of the good life**.

And I want to **iterate plainly and clearly** that I find **nothing wrong with any of these**, nor anything wrong with **wanting them**, nor anything wrong with **therapists helping their clients obtain them**.

However, a number of **psychologists who I respect** have observed that **individuals who satisfy every level of Maslow's hierarchy**, who have **all the esteem, love, and belonging they could possibly hope for**, can still be rotten people.

There is nothing about **personal fulfillment and self-actualization in nearly any of the versions on offer in the therapeutic world** that automatically leads to character transformation or moral goodness.

### **The Purpose of the Gospel**

We **can and should** seek to **feed the hungry**, both **the physically hungry and the emotionally hungry**, but **we should not presume that this by itself is the purpose of the Gospel**.

### **Christ and Maslow's Hierarchy**

In fact, our **moral Exemplar** once quipped:

**"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head."**

And of Him, we read:

**"He is despised and rejected of men, a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not."**

Jesus Christ **did not satisfy any level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs**, because **that was never really the point**.

The point was **to conquer sin and death**, and **that is the gift that He seeks to offer us**.

His goal was to **help us overcome the Fall**, to **overcome sin**, and to **be reunited with our Father in Heaven**.

And I firmly believe that **following Christ and becoming like Him** involves, at times and seasons, and for reasons known only to **our infinitely wise Father in Heaven**, for some more than others, **experiencing some of the same deprivations that He did**.

## King Lamoni's Father: An Example of True Treasure

I invite you to consider—um—what was **King Lamoni's father's greatest treasure** when he knelt and prayed?

**"Oh God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God, and if there is a God, and if Thou art God, wilt Thou make Thyself known unto me? And I will give away all my sins to know Thee, and that I may be raised from the dead and be saved at the last day."**

And following his **conversion**, and the **conversion of his family**, and the **conversion of many of his subjects**, many of them had a journey that **did not resemble Maslow's hierarchy of needs, to put it mildly**.

## Which of These Values Overrides the Others?

Let's go back to **the four worldviews** again.

There is **nothing wrong with valuing self-expression, professional success, or personal fulfillment**.

These **values can be good values**.

I am **not arguing that we should not climb Maslow's hierarchy of needs, or seek to be successful in life, or express ourselves in our various communities**.

The **question** is:

## Which of these values overrides all of the others?

For example, do we say:

- **"I am willing to keep my covenants only so long as it doesn't jeopardize my career goals?"**
- **"I'm willing to keep my covenants only so long as it doesn't require me to sacrifice some measure of personal fulfillment?"**

Or do we say instead:

**"I will seek after professional success, self-expression, and personal fulfillment only so far as that does not stand between me and God, or lead me away from my covenants with God?"**

## When Other Values Become the Main Plot

Which of these **core values** sets **the bounds for all of the others**?

And when any of these **other values—self-expression, material comfort, professional success, cultural milestones, self-fulfillment, and so on—become the main plot of our life story**, we can encounter what I sometimes refer to as **gospel counterfeits**.

## Understanding Gospel Counterfeits

The term *counterfeit* carries a strong **negative connotation**.

We see counterfeits as **malicious lawbreakers**. In this context, however, I use the term in a **more descriptive way**.

A **counterfeit** is simply something that is **superficially similar**—um—to the real thing, similar enough **to be mistaken for it**, but **crucially different underneath**.

It's like **fool's gold**, so to speak.

In each case, the **performances of faith** may be **superficially similar**. For example, those who **embrace each of these worldviews** might **pray and seek God's involvement in their lives**, but for **fundamentally different reasons, for different aims and purposes**.

### **What Is the Purpose of Our Covenant Living?**

Which of these do we see as **the purpose of our covenant living**?

President **Oaks** taught:

**"Each of us has a personal lens through which we view the world. Our lens gives us a special tint to all that we see. It can suppress some features and emphasize others."**

For example, **what does love look like to us**?

How we **feel God's love**, how we **feel the love of others**, and how we **express love for others** depends on what we hold as our **greatest treasure**.

### **Personal Authenticity as the Greatest Treasure**

If we see **personal authenticity** as our **greatest treasure**, um, then **love** is going to look a whole lot like:

- **Celebrating me for who I am**
- **Celebrating others for who they are**

I'm going to feel **loved when—and only when—I feel that others accept me and my choices**.

I'm going to feel **unloved** when people **evaluate my choices** or **prescribe a course of action for my life**.

### **Prosperity Gospel and Love**

If we **unwittingly embrace the Prosperity Gospel**, then if we experience **poor health, financial struggles, struggling to find a spouse, failing to win the election, or if our book isn't published**, we might **start to feel less loved by God**.

### **Personal Fulfillment as the Greatest Treasure**

And if we see **personal fulfillment** as our **greatest treasure**, then love is going to be about **others meeting our personal needs**, helping us to **feel fulfilled**, whatever that looks like for us.

So, when someone **invites us to live chastely**, forgoing **perceived needs for physical intimacy**, we might see that as **a lack of concern for us, an unloving thing to do**.



## **Reconciliation with God as the Greatest Treasure**

But when we see **reconciling with God as our greatest treasure**, then love might, in fact, look a lot like **invitations to live our covenants**.

I might even see **evidence of divine favor in my greatest disappointments and in calls to sacrifice**.

**God loves me so much** that He **puts me in situations that force me to clarify my priorities and to shed the baggage that separates me from Him**.

## **Same Words, Different Meanings**

When **two cultural tribes use the same words to mean different things**, this is a **recipe for conflict and confusion**.

Let me give another example—well, just one more example of that.

When those who embrace **the Redemptive Gospel** speak of **non-judgmental love**, they are typically speaking about **non-condemnatory love—condemning no person for their actions**.

## **Different Meanings of Non-Judgmental Love**

When those who embrace **the Expressive Gospel** speak of **non-judgmental love**, they are often talking about **non-evaluative love—evaluating no actions**.

We can use **the same vocabulary** but mean **entirely different things**, because of **the worldview we have embraced**, because of **what we treat as our greatest treasure in life**.

## **What Does Authenticity Look Like?**

Actually, I have **one more example of this**.

What does **authenticity** look like?

I'm going to go out on a limb and say—well, first off, I'm going to say **authenticity is one of the buzzwords of our modern culture**.

It was the **word of the year** last year—I think it was—or the year before. I don't remember which—um.

And I'm going to make a **claim—a bold claim**.

I think that there are **few things in life that are more important than being authentic**.

But **what do we mean by that?**

For the sake of time, I'll just do **two worldviews** on this one.

## **Authenticity in the Expressive Gospel**

In **the Expressive Gospel**, to be **authentic** means to **express all of my unique desires and preferences and characteristics**, even if they are **contrary to the norms and expectations of others**.

It means **asserting myself on the world—being myself—over and against all the moral prescriptives of faith and community.**

### **Authenticity in the Redemptive Gospel**

In contrast, if I embrace **the Redemptive Gospel**, **authenticity** might mean **something fundamentally different.**

It might mean **being genuinely good, unhypocritical, diligent in my discipleship.**

It might mean **not making a pretense of keeping the commandments or of living Christlike virtues, but being the real deal.**

And that's **not something we can do ourselves.**

We **need Christ** to **change our very natures**, to **make us new creatures** by **changing our fundamental values.**

### **Living the Gospel Among Other Worldviews**

The existence of **other worldviews** is **not by itself the problem.**

I think **the Gospel is intended to be lived as one worldview among competitors.**

Mortality is a **bubbling cauldron of worldviews**, so that **we can, by contrast, understand the Gospel more fully as we live it.**

When family and friends **embrace self-expression, personal fulfillment, and professional success** as their **core values**, I think **we can disagree without being disagreeable.**

We can **embrace an ecumenical spirit** and **seek mutual understanding** with those who embrace other worldviews.

We can do this while still **pursuing redemption through Christ as our guiding value** and **inviting others to do the same.**

### **When Do Worldviews Become Gospel Counterfeits?**

But why, then, did I **refer to these competing worldviews as Gospel counterfeits?**

Even that's **not very ecumenical**, after all.

When embraced on **their own terms**, other worldviews and values **can be alternatives to the Gospel** or even **supplements to the Gospel**, when pursued **within proper bounds.**

But not **necessarily Gospel counterfeits.**

They **become Gospel counterfeits** when they **come to be seen as the Gospel of Jesus Christ.**

That is, when they are **clothed in religious vernacular** and **presented as the scriptural message.**

Put in **different terms**, other worldviews **become Gospel counterfeits** when they **shift what we see as the purpose of Gospel living** and when they **redefine or co-opt important Gospel vocabulary.**

## **The Need for Cultural Vigilance**

When this **syncretism** distorts **the purposes of the Gospel** and **redefines our core Gospel vocabulary**, we need to be **more culturally vigilant** and **more discerning**.

The **need for respect and kindness remains the same**, but the **need for clarity becomes more important than ever**.

Various **cultural influencers** can unwittingly—um—**speak the familiar language of the Gospel** but, by **reordering our values in subtle ways**, offer a **very subtle and, at times, pernicious counterfeit of the Gospel**.

## **The Danger of Counterfeits**

The **danger** is that, though our **vocabulary will remain the same**, the **core values of our faith will be replaced with the core values of a foreign worldview**.

Some have **left the faith** because they **felt let down by a gospel that was never the Gospel of Jesus Christ**.

Put in a different way, **some never leave the Gospel of Jesus Christ because they were never converted to it in the first place**.

Rather, they were **converted to a very subtle distortion or counterfeit of it**—versions of:

- **The Prosperity Gospel**
- **The Expressive Gospel**
- **The Therapeutic Gospel**

...wearing **the garb and speaking the language of the Redemptive Gospel**.

## **How We Drift Away from the Redemptive Gospel**

Other times, we were **originally converted to the Redemptive Gospel**, but the **priorities of the world and the messages on social media crowd in and nudge us over time into a competing set of values**.

Until **we are using the same words and speaking the same language**, but embracing an entirely **different worldview**.

And when these **subtle counterfeits disappoint us—as all counterfeits eventually do**—we assume **we were disappointed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ**.

## **Stepping Into a Sturdier Faith**

Rather than **take offense** at the notion that we **sometimes embrace Gospel counterfeits**, I believe we can **take heart in the possibility of stepping into new and more sturdy faith**.

We can **rejoice** that whatever we thought the Gospel was, **it might be something so much better and so much more**. A **Gospel of Jesus Christ** that promises us **the transformation of character, reconciliation with God, and the gifts and fruits of the Spirit** is **more beautiful, hopeful, and**

**ennobling** than a Gospel that promises us **merely a life of comfort without disappointment**, a Gospel that offers **a life without sacrifice or grief**, or a Gospel that **promises us mere personal fulfillment**.

And I believe **this Gospel also has the benefit of being more real**.

**Thank You**