

Episode 105: Love, Part 6

This is the sixth part of a special series on love, where Denver teaches us how we can live according to the two great commandments: Love God, and Love One Another.

Denver: In this creation, there are two opposing forces that cause everything there is to be and to exist. Those two opposing forces are not good and evil, although we tend to call them 'good' and call them 'evil.' The two opposing forces are, in fact, love and fear. Everything that is generative or creative comes about as a consequence of love. If you think about all the problems that people have with one another and what would solve them, the one thing that could solve *every* problem is love—if we loved one another enough. And all of those vices—all of the suffering, the anger, the pride, the envy, the impatience, the greed—have their root in fear. "I fear I will not have enough and therefore I envy. I fear for my own inability, and therefore I resent your ability." Everything that produces negativity comes about as a consequence of fear.

Nature testifies over and over again. It doesn't matter when the sun goes down, there's going to be another dawn. It doesn't matter when all the leaves fall off the deciduous trees in the fall, there's going to come a spring. There's going to be a renewal of life. There are all kinds of animals in nature that go through this really loathsome, disgusting, wretched existence, and then they transform. And where they were a pest before, *now* they're bright, and they're colorful, and they fly, and they pollinate. Butterflies help produce the very kinds of things that their larval stage destroyed. These are signs. These are testimonies. Just like the transformation of the caterpillar into the butterfly, the pest into the thing of beauty, the thing that ate the vegetables that you were trying to grow into the thing that helps pollinate the things that you want to grow—that's the plan for all of us.

So, when you study the scriptures the objective should not be, "Can I trust the text? Can I evaluate the text? Can I use a form of criticism against the text in order to weigh, dismiss, belittle, judge?" Take all that you know about nature, take all that you know about this world and the majesty of it all, take all that you know that informs you that there is hope, there is joy, there is love. Why do you love your children? Why do your children love you? These kinds of things exist. They're real, they're tangible, and they're important; and they're part of what God did when He created this world. Keep *that* in mind when you're studying, and search the scriptures to try and help inform you how you can better appreciate, how you can better enjoy, how you can better love, how you can better have hope. What do they have to say that can bring you closer to God, not, "Can I find a way to dismiss something that Joseph said or did?"

As soon as Joseph was gone off the scene, people that envied the position that he occupied took over custody of everything, including the documents. And what we got as a consequence of that is a legacy that allowed a trillion-dollar empire to be constructed. Religion should require our sacrifice; it should not be here to benefit us. We should have to give, not get. And in the giving of ourselves, what we get is in the interior—it's in the heart. It's the things of enduring beauty and value. If your study takes you away from an

appreciation of the love, the charity, the things that matter most, reorient your study.

God really is up to a work—right now. And the work that is underway *can* culminate in Zion. Covenants were made; promises were given. God has an obligation to the covenant fathers that He *will* vindicate. God's words *will* be fulfilled, all of them. None of them are going to fall to the ground unfulfilled. The question is not, “Will God bring about the culmination of all His purposes?” The question is, “Are we willing to cooperate with Him to bring those purposes to pass in our day?” It could— The offer that God makes— This appears in scripture nearly as often as the promise in Malachi. God says, *How oft would I have gathered you as a hen [gathers] her [chicks] under her wings....and ye would not!* (Matthew 23:37 and 3 Nephi 10:5; see also Matthew 10:36 RE and 3 Nephi 4:9 RE).

Could God have brought about His purposes and vindicated His promises in the days of Moses? Could He have done what He had promised to do when Christ was here on the earth? Could He have done it in the days of Peter? Could He have done it in the days of Joseph Smith? The question is never whether God *will* vindicate His promises. The question is, “Will there ever come a people who will respond to the Lord's willingness to gather them as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and be gathered, and be content with being gathered and being at peace with one another?” We have that opportunity, but so many generations before us have had the same opportunity *and they would not*.

The question isn't whether God is going to do it, or whether God is willing to do it now. The question is, “Are we willing to cooperate with Him in that process, to do our part?” We get really petty with one another, and we shouldn't be. We ought to value one another so highly that we'll do anything we can to support one another and to assist in bringing about the purposes of God. At the end of the day, obedience to God is simply blessing one another by the way we conduct ourselves. I like the Lamanite king's prayer: *I will give away all my sins to know [you]* (Alma 22:18; see also Alma 13:10 RE). We tend not to be willing to give away our sins. We want to harbor them, and cultivate them, and celebrate them. We ought to be more— We ought to love God more and our sins less. God *can* fulfill His promises in our day, before *we* leave this stage of the action. It can happen. Whether it happens or not is up to us and how interested we are in doing as He bids us.

Salvation *is* individual. There is *only* individual salvation and no such thing as collective salvation. While I accept this is true, there is something else that is equally true: God wants people to *collectively* be His. In the revelations of July 14, 2017, and Oct 4, 2018, received from God—those are in the Teachings and Commandments as sections 157 and 176—the emphasis has been on people. Both responses by the Lord have gone beyond individual salvation to focus on people, Zion, and the New Jerusalem. Consider these words from the Answer to the Prayer for Covenant, addressing the importance of God's people:

*I, the Lord, say to you: You have asked of me concerning the scriptures prepared on [your] behalf of all those who seek to become **my covenant people**, and therefore I answer you on behalf of **all the people**, and not as to any individual. For there are those who are humble, patient, and easily persuaded. Nevertheless, people who are*

quarrelsome and proud are also among you, and since you seek to **unite** to become **one people**, I answer you as one.

I covenanted with Adam at the beginning, which covenant was broken by mankind. Since the days of Adam I have always sought to reestablish **people of covenant** among the living, and therefore have desired that man should love one another, not begrudgingly, but as brothers and sisters indeed, that I may establish my covenant and provide **them** with light and truth.

For the sake of the promises to the fathers [I will] labor with you as a **people**, and not because of you, for you have not yet become what you must be to **live together** in peace. If you will hearken [unto] my words, I will make you **my people** and my words will give you peace. Even a single soul who stirs up the hearts of others to anger can destroy the peace of all my people. Each of you must equally walk truly in my path, not only to profess, but to do as you profess.

There are many things yet to be restored unto my people. It is ordained that some things are only to be given to **people** who are mine and cannot otherwise be given to mankind on earth. You do not yet understand the glory to be revealed **unto my covenant people**.

It is not enough to receive my covenant, but you must also abide it. And all who abide it, whether on this land or any other land, will be mine...I will watch over **them** and protect **them** in the day of harvest, and gather **them**...as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. I will number you among the remnant of Jacob, no longer outcasts, and you will inherit the promises of Israel. You shall be **my people** and I will be your God, and the sword will not devour you. And unto **those** who will receive will more be given, until **they** know the mysteries of God in full.

You pray each time you partake of the sacrament to always have my spirit to be with you. And what is my spirit? It is to love one another as I have loved you. Do my works and you will know my doctrine, for you will uncover hidden mysteries by obedience to these things that can be uncovered in no other way. This is the way I will restore knowledge to **my people**. If you return good for evil, you will cleanse yourself and know the joy of your Master. You call me Lord, and do well to regard me so, but to know your Lord is to love one another. Flee from the cares and longings that belong to Babylon, obtain a new heart, for you have all been wounded. In me you will find peace, and through me will come Zion, a place of peace and safety.

Be of one heart, and regard one another with charity. Measure your words before giving voice to them, and consider the hearts of others. Although a man may err in understanding concerning many things, yet he can view his brother with charity and come unto me, and through me he can with patience overcome the world. I can bring him to understanding and knowledge. Therefore, if you regard one another with charity, then your brother's error in understanding will not divide you. I lead to all truth. I will lead **all** who come to me to the truth of all things. The fullness is to receive the truth of all things, and this too from me, in power, by my word, and in very deed. For I will come unto you if you will come unto me.

Study to learn how to respect **your brothers and sisters** and to come together by precept, reason, and persuasion, rather than sharply disputing and wrongly condemning each other, causing anger. Take care how you invoke my name. Mankind

has been controlled by the adversary through anger and jealousy, which has led to bloodshed and the misery of many souls. Even strong disagreements should not provoke anger, nor to invoke my name in vain as if I had part in your every dispute. Pray together in humility and together meekly present your dispute to me, and if you are contrite before me, I will tell you my part. ([Emphasis added.] T&C 157:1-2,19,44,48,51,53-54 RE)

These are God's words in the Answer to the Prayer for Covenant. The focus is on the community and not on the individual. It's taken me years to notice that. This focus is different for a reason. Our traditions have not and cannot bring Zion. That will require viewing God's work *in a new way*. Individuals may be saved individually, and have been throughout history, but Zion is not about individual salvation. Zion is about covenant people of God—individually saved as a prerequisite, then gathered together to live in peace. As part of the same revelation, there is a covenant that contains language that also moves the focus to community instead of individual:

*Do you covenant with [the Lord] to cease to do evil and to seek to continually do good?
Second: Do you have faith in these things and receive the scriptures approved by the Lord as a standard to govern you in your daily walk in life, to accept the obligations established by the Book of Mormon as a covenant, and to use the scriptures to correct yourselves and to guide your words, thoughts, and deeds?*

*Third: Do you agree to assist **all others** — who covenant to [do] likewise accept this standard to govern **their** lives — to keep the Lord's will, to succor **those** who stand in need, to lighten the burdens of **your brothers and sisters** whenever you are able, and to care for the poor among you?*

*Fourth: ...do you covenant to seek to become of **one heart** with those who seek the Lord to establish His righteousness? ([Emphasis added.] T&C 158:2-5 RE)*

After those questions are answered:

Now, hear the words of the Lord to those who receive this covenant this day:

***All** you who have turned from your wicked ways and repented of your evil doings, of lying and deceiving, and of all whoredoms, and of secret abominations, idolatries, murders, priestcrafts, envying, and strife, and from all wickedness and abominations, and have come unto me, and been baptized in my name, and have received a remission of your sins, and received the holy ghost, are now numbered with **my people** who are of the house of Israel. I say to you:*

Teach your children to honor me. Seek to recover the lost sheep remnant of this land and of Israel and no longer forsake them. Bring them unto me and teach them of my ways, to walk in them.

And I, the Lord your God, will be with you and will never forsake you, and I will lead you in the path which will bring peace to you in the troubling season now fast approaching.

I will raise you up and protect you, abide with you, and gather you in due time, and this shall be a land of promise to you as your inheritance from me.

The earth will yield its increase, and you will flourish upon the mountains and upon the hills, and the wicked will not come against you because the fear of the Lord will be with you.

*I will visit my house, which the remnant of my people shall build, and I will dwell therein, to be **among you**, and no one will need...say, Know ye the Lord, for you all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.*

I will teach you things that have been hidden from the foundation of the world and your understanding will reach unto Heaven.

And you shall be called the children of the Most High God, and I will preserve you against the harvest.

*And the angels sent to harvest the world will gather the wicked into bundles to be burned, but will **pass over you as my peculiar treasure**.*

*But if you do not honor me, nor seek to recover my people Israel, nor teach your children to honor me, nor care for the poor among you, nor help lighten one another's burdens, then you have no promise from me and I will raise up other **people** who will honor and serve me, and give unto them this land, and if **they** repent, I will abide with **them**. ([Emphasis added.] Ibid., para(s) 9-19)*

People claim they have kept the covenant, but such claims cannot possibly be true. God's covenant is for and about people—His people. It is not possible for an individual to keep the covenant. Everybody rises together or everybody falls together. The covenant can only be kept as a community. Individuals acting alone can never accomplish what is required of the group. The October 4, 2018, revelation—T&C 176—also focuses on community. It begins by addressing people, and not the individual. The Lord's voice to people begins and ends with two questions. After asking the questions a second time, He gives an answer to what ought to have been learned. Hear the Lord's words to the people:

You ask on behalf of my people, and therefore I answer my people. Hear, therefore, my words:

What have you learned? What ought you to have learned?

[And then at the end:] I ask again, What have you learned? What ought you to have learned?

*I say to you that there is need for but one house, and I accept the statement you have adopted, and approve it as your statement to be added. But I say again, there was honor in the labor of others. Whereas I look upon the heart and see faithful service, many among you do not look at, nor see, nor value what I, the Lord, love in the hearts of my people. As I have said before, I say again: Love one another, labor willingly alongside each other. Learn what you ought, and when I ask you to labor, do so wisely, even if you know not beforehand what you will find. I do not ask what you cannot do. Trust my words and proceed always in faith, believing that with me all things are possible. **All who have been faithful are mine**. ([Emphasis added.] T&C 176:1-2, 12-13 RE)*

Just as an aside, when the sacrament was passed and the group of brethren who came up

here to perform that came up on stage in flannel, and shorts, and motley colored shirts—to look upon that, to me, was a delight. It was a statement of the fact that righteousness holds no costume up, to pretend to be something it isn't. Righteousness comes in divergent forms and manifests itself in unexpected ways. Had any one of those individuals come up to pass the sacrament among *some* congregations, dressed as they were today, they would have excited the judgment, the censure, the horror of someone observing them in that garb. But to us it's accepted and it's acceptable. I would hope that if one among us chose to wear a white shirt and a tie to come up to pass the sacrament, while standing among them that none of us would look upon that judgmentally and with disfavor, but that everyone would be welcomed, everyone would be accepted. And that we would be just as tolerant of others and their idiosyncrasies as we are of what we expect to be among us.

God mentions 'His people' in order to get our attention. The prophecies of God's last-days work and the fulfillment of God's covenants with the fathers are not merely for individual salvation. The covenants are about people, or a divinely-organized community. Righteous individuals, isolated and scattered throughout the world, are incapable of vindicating the promises made to the fathers. There *must* be people gathered together and living the correct pattern *before* the Lord returns.

There have been only two societies in recorded history that became Zion. Because of the age of the world at the time, both were taken up into heaven. We have very little to help us understand *why* these two succeeded. Apart from describing them as *of one heart, one mind...and...no poor among them*, we know little else. (See Moses 7:18; see also Genesis 4:14 RE and T&C 175:39 RE.) But perhaps that is one of the most important things we *can* know about them. Maybe the point is that *nothing*, and *no one*, stood out as remarkable or different within the community. There were no heroes and no villains, no rich and no poor, no Shakespearean plot lines of betrayal, intrigue, ambition, conflict, and envy. There was no adultery, theft, robbery, murder, immorality, and drunkenness—in other words, nothing to entertain us—because *all our* stories, movies, music, novels, television plots, and social media are based upon and captivated by everything that is *missing* from these societies.

The centuries-long period of peace described in the Book of Mormon occupies only a few short pages in 4 Nephi. Their society was marked by the presence of peace, the absence of conflict, and abiding stability. This is what they attained:

There were no contentions and disputations among them, and every man did deal justly one with another. And they had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free and partakers of the heavenly gift. (4 Nephi 1:2-3; see also 4 Nephi 1:1 RE)

Because there was no future ministry for them to perform, their Zion society was not taken up to heaven. Because the world was not yet ready for the Lord to return in judgment, neither Enoch nor Melchizedek returned with their people to fall on *their* necks and kiss *them*. These people were most remarkable for what they *lacked*. How they grew to lack these divisions, contentions, and disputes is described in very few, simple words:

They did walk after the commandments which they had received from the Lord...their God, continuing in fasting and prayer, and in meeting together oft both to pray and to hear the word of the Lord. And it came to pass...there was no contention among all the people, in all the land. (4 Nephi 1:12-13; see also 4 Nephi 1:2 RE)

What were the names of their leaders? We don't know because, apparently, there were none. Who were their great teachers? Again, we don't know because they were not identified. Who governed? Apparently no one. They had things in common, obeyed God's commandments, and spent time praying and hearing the word of the Lord. They were so *very unlike us*. To make the point clear for us, the record of these people explains:

There was no contention in the land because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people. And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness. (4 Nephi 1:15-16; see also 4 Nephi 1:3 RE)

All the negatives were missing because the love of God dwelt in their hearts. Something else describes them:

And surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God. (Ibid.)

Consider those words carefully. You cannot be happier than by allowing the love of God to dwell in you. The happiest people who have ever lived did so by the profound peace they displayed, equality they shared, fairness they showed one another, and love of God in their hearts. This is a description of our social opposites. Reviewing the Answer to the Prayer for Covenant, the Covenant, and the recent Parable of the Master's House shows that the Lord is pleading for *us* to become *this*. It's not easy. It will require civilizing the uncivilized. However, it is necessary to become the wise virgins and the invited guests wearing the wedding garment.

Five of the virtuous virgins who were *expecting the wedding party to arrive* were, nevertheless, excluded. They were virgins like the others, but the others were allowed to enter and they were not. They did not lack virginity. They did not lack notice. They were not surprised by an unexpected wedding party arriving. But they lacked *oil*, which is a symbol of the Holy Ghost. They failed to acquire the necessary spirit with which to avoid conflict, envy, strife, tumult, and contention. To grow into the kind of people God will want to welcome into His dwelling requires practice, experience, and effort. People have not done it. Devout, religious people are *not prepared* to live in peace, with all things in common, with no poor among them. God is trying to create a civilization that does not yet exist.

It is a *privilege* for God to give guidance to help prepare His people. There has always been a promise from the Lord that those who inherit Zion will be given commandments from

Him to follow. He declared:

*Yea, blessed are they whose feet stand upon the land of Zion, who have obeyed my gospel; for **they** shall receive for **their** reward the good things of the earth, and it shall bring forth...its strength. And they shall also be crowned with blessings from above, yea...with commandments not a few, and with revelations in their time—[that] they...are faithful and [diligently] before me. ([Emphasis added.] D&C 59:3-4; see also T&C 46:1 RE)*

Those who mock or criticize efforts to complete the Restoration are defining themselves as unworthy by their own words. *No matter how good they may otherwise be*, when they embrace conflict, envy, strife, tumult, and contention, they cannot be invited to the wedding of the Lamb.

We need more commandments from God to prepare for what is coming. The example in 4 Nephi commends those people who walk after the commandments received from our Lord and God. There should be fasting and prayer. People should meet together, pray, and review the words of the Lord. Every step taken will make us more like those virgins who have oil in their lamps and less like the foolish virgins who took no effort to make the required preparation.

It's not enough to avoid outright evil—we have to be good. Being 'good' means to be separate from the world, united in charity towards each other, and to have united hearts. If we are ready when the wedding party arrives, we must follow the Lord's *commandments to us*. They are for our good. He wants us to awaken and arise from an awful slumber.

The third such society will not be taken into heaven; instead, it will welcome the return of the first two to the earth. Why would ancient, righteous societies caught up to heaven want to leave there to come and meet with a city of people on earth? Why would they fall on their necks and kiss *that* gathered body of believers? And above all else, why would Christ want to occupy a tabernacle and dwell with such a community? Obviously, because there will be people living on earth whose civilization is like the society in heaven.

The Ten Commandments outlines basic social norms needed for peace and stability. Christ's Sermon on the Mount was His exposition on the Ten Commandments. He expounded on the need to align the intent of the heart with God's standard to love your fellow man, do good to those who abuse you, and hold no anger. He took us deeper. Where the Ten Commandments allowed reluctant, resentful, and hard-hearted conformity, the Sermon on the Mount requires a willing readiness to obey. Christ wants us to act with alacrity to follow Him. He taught us to treat others as you would want to be treated.

The answer to these questions is easy to conceptualize and easy to verbalize, but living the answer is beyond mankind's ability to endure. We do not want to lay down our pride, ambition, jealousy, envy, strife, and lusts to become *that* community. Everybody will have to make changes. The most important changes have been provided in a blueprint revealed

in the Answer to Prayer for Covenant, including the terms of the covenant. We are expected to remember and obey these words:

My will is to have you love one another. As people, you lack the ability to respectfully disagree among one another.

Wisdom counsels mankind to align their words with their hearts, but mankind refuses to take counsel from Wisdom.

There have been sharp disputes between you that should have been avoided. I speak these words to reprove you that you may learn, not to upbraid you so that you mourn. I want my people to have understanding.

Satan is a title and means accuser, opponent, and adversary; hence once he fell, Lucifer became, or in other words was called, Satan, because he accuses others and opposes the Father. I rebuked Peter and called him Satan because he was wrong in opposing the Father's will for me, and Peter understood and repented.

In the work you have performed there are those who have been Satan, accusing one another, wounding hearts, and causing jarring, contention, and strife by their accusations. Rather than loving one another, even among you who desire a good thing, some have dealt unkindly as if they were...opponents, accusers, and adversaries. In this they were wrong.

For you are like a man who seeks for good fruit from a neglected vineyard — unwatered, undunged, unpruned, and unattended. How shall it produce good fruit if you fail to tend it? What reward does the unfaithful husbandman obtain from his neglected vineyard? How can saying you are a faithful husbandman ever produce good fruit in the vineyard without doing the work of the husbandman? For you seek my words to recover them even as you forsake to do them. You have heretofore produced wild fruit, bitter and ill-formed, because you neglect to do my words.

You have not yet become what you must be to live together in peace. If you will hearken to my words, I will make you my people and my words will give you peace. Even a single soul who stirs up the hearts of others to anger can destroy the peace of all my people. Each of you must equally walk truly in my path, not only to profess, but to do as you profess.

The Book of Mormon was given as my covenant for this day and contains my gospel, which came forth to allow people to understand my work and [to] obtain my salvation. Yet many of you are like those who reject the Book of Mormon, because you say, but you do not do. As a people you honor with your lips, but your hearts are corrupt, filled with envy and malice, returning evil for good, sparing none — even those with pure hearts among you — from your unjustified accusations and unkind backbiting. You have not obtained the fullness of my salvation because you do not draw near to me.

Hear therefore my words: Repent and bring forth fruit showing repentance, and I will establish my covenant with you and claim you as mine.

[It's] not enough to receive my covenant, but you must also abide it. And all who abide it, whether on this land or any other land, will be mine, and I will watch over them and protect them in the day of harvest, and gather them...as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. I will number you among the remnant of Jacob, no longer outcasts, and you will inherit the promises of Israel. You shall be my people and I will be your God, and the sword will not devour you. And unto those who will receive will more be given, until they know the mysteries of God in full.

You pray each time you partake of the sacrament to always have my spirit to be with you. And what is my spirit? It is to love one another as [I've] loved you. Do my works and you will know my doctrine, for you will uncover hidden mysteries by obedience to these things that can be uncovered in no other way. This is the way I will restore knowledge to my people. If you return good for evil, you will cleanse yourself and know the joy of your Master. You call me Lord, and do well to regard me so, but to know your Lord is to love one another. Flee from the cares and longings that belong to Babylon, obtain a new heart, for you have all been wounded. In me you will find peace, and through me will come Zion, a place of peace and safety.

Be of one heart...regard one another with charity. Measure your words before giving voice to them.

There remains [a] great work yet to be done. Receive my covenant and abide in it, not as in the former time when jarring, jealousy, contention, and backbiting caused anger, broke hearts, and hardened the souls of those claiming to be my saints. But receive it in spirit, in meekness, and in truth. I have given you a former commandment that I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men. And again, I have taught [you] that if you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive your trespasses. How do I act toward mankind? If men intend no offense, I take no offense, but if they are taught and should have obeyed, then I reprove and correct, and forgive and forget. You cannot be at peace with one another if you take offense when none is intended. But again I say, Judge not others except by the rule you want used to weigh yourself. (T&C 157:3,4,5,8,9,17,19,20,23,48,51,53,58 RE)

One of the questions that someone asked is, "Why are we admonished to pursue judgment?" The answer are those words I just read to you: *I say, Judge not others except by the rule you want used to weigh yourself.* Pursue judgment whenever the opportunity presents itself. Use judgment to evaluate based upon the standard you want applied to yourself, and pursue judgment.

The earth groans under the wickedness of mankind upon her face, and she longs for peace to come. She withholds the abundance of her bounty because of the offenses of men against me, against one another, and against her. But if righteousness returns and my people prove by their actions, words, and thoughts to yield to my spirit and hearken to my commandments, then will the earth rejoice, for the feet of those who cry peace upon her mountains are beautiful indeed, and I, the Lord, will bring again Zion, and the earth will rejoice.

In the world, tares are ripening. And so I ask you, What of the wheat?

Cry peace. Proclaim my words. Invite those who will repent to be baptized and forgiven, and they shall obtain my spirit to guide them. (Ibid., para(s) 63, 64, 65)

That excerpt contains nearly 2,000 words of instruction. There is no basis to claim ignorance. Is it possible for people to change their civilization and go from strident, quarrelsome, and pugnaciousness to loving one another?

Perhaps the Book of Mormon contains one account to give us hope. Following conversion, one group of Lamanites were led by a king who encouraged them to lay down their unbloodied weapons rather than ever shed blood again. This meant they could not defend themselves. After their king finished his proposal, this took place:

And now it came to pass that when the king had made an end of these sayings, and all the people were assembled together, they took their swords and all [their] weapons which were used for the shedding of man's blood, and they did bury them up deep in the earth. And this they did, it being in their view a testimony to God, and also to men, that they never would use weapons again for the shedding of man's blood; and this they did vouching and covenanting with God, that rather than shed the blood of their brethren they would give up their own lives; and rather than take away from a brother they would give unto him; and rather than spend their days in idleness they would labor abundantly with their hands. And thus we see that, when these Lamanites were brought to believe and to know the truth, [that] they were firm, and would suffer even unto death rather than commit sin; and thus we see that they buried the weapons of peace, or they buried [their] weapons of war, for peace. (Alma 24:17-19; see also Alma 14:9 RE)

When their resolve was tested, they passed. Rather than take up arms they laid down their lives:

Now when the people saw that they were coming against them they went out to meet them and prostrated themselves before them to the earth, and began to call on the name of the Lord; and thus they were in [the] attitude when the Lamanites began to fall upon them, and began to slay them with the sword...thus without meeting any resistance, they did slay a thousand and five of them; and we know that they are blessed, for they have gone to dwell with their God. Now when the Lamanites saw that

their brethren would not flee from the sword, neither would they turn aside to the right...or...the left, but that they would lie down and perish, and praised God even in the very act of perishing under the sword— Now when the Lamanites saw this they did forbear from slaying them; and there were many whose hearts had swollen in them for those of their brethren who had fallen under the sword, for they repented of the [thing] which they had done.

And it came to pass that they threw down their weapons of war, and they would not take them again, for they were stung for the murders which they'd committed; and they came down even as their brethren, relying upon the mercies of those whose arms were lifted [up] to slay them.

And it came to pass that the people of God were joined that day by more than the number who had been slain. (Alma 24:21-26; see also Alma 14:10-12 RE)

This event is astonishing and many have been shocked by the extreme behavior of these believers. *We* are not being asked to lay down our weapons and be killed. *We* are only being asked to lay down our hostility, slander, and abuse of one another—to become peaceful and loving. This is a good thing that benefits everybody. Despite this, we keep our pride, ambition, jealousy, envy, strife, and lusts. These destructive desires are preferred over forgiving offenses in meekness, love, and kindness. None of us are asked to die for a covenant, but are only asked to be more like Christ, and forgive and love one another. This seems so difficult a challenge that we quarrel and dispute among ourselves. We remain haughty and self-righteous, and fail to realize self-righteousness is a lie, a mirage, utterly untrue. We must trade our pride for humility or we will never be able to keep the covenant. Remember, it is a group who must keep the covenant, not individuals. Together we must act consistent with the obligation we agreed to perform before God.

As aggravating and trying as people are on one another, we need to go through this. There is no magic path to loving one another. Some people refuse and must be left outside. When it comes to loving others, some things must be abandoned, some things must be added, some things must be forgotten, and some things must be ignored. But learning what to abandon, add, forget, or ignore is only through the *doing*. We chip away at ourselves and others by interacting and sharing.

We will learn things about one another that will distress us, and we may well wish we didn't know some things about others. How will the socially offensive become socially acceptable without help from a loving society? And how can a society become loving if people are not broad-minded enough to figure out that some things just don't matter? Few things really are important. If a man is honest, just, virtuous, and true, should you care if he swears? If a man has a heart of gold and would give you assistance if he thought it was needed, should you care if he is rough and uncouth?

The adulterous and predatory will rarely reform, and must often be excluded. They will victimize and destroy. We are commanded to cast out those who steal, love and make a lie, commit adultery, and refuse to repent. The instructions we have been given state:

You shall not kill; he that kills shall die. You shall not steal...he that steals and will not repent shall be cast out. You shall not lie; he that lies and will not repent shall be cast out. You shall love your wife with all your heart, and shall cleave unto her and none else...he that looks upon a woman to lust after her shall deny the faith, and shall not have the spirit, and if he repent not...shall be cast out. You shall not commit adultery, and he that commits adultery and repents not shall be cast out; and he that commits adultery and repents with all his heart, and forsakes [it] and does it no more, you shall forgive him; but if he does it again, he shall not be forgiven, [and] shall be cast out. You shall not speak evil of your neighbor [nor] or do him any harm. You know my laws, they are given in my scriptures. He that sins and repents not shall be cast out. If you love me, you shall serve me and keep all my commandments. (T&C 26:6 RE; see also D&C 42:19-29)

This teaching is still binding. If your fellowship includes those who ought to *be cast out*, you have the obligation to do so rather than encouraging evil. Be patient, but be firm. If a person refuses to repent and forsake sins, you may end fellowship with them, and include those who are interested in practicing obedience and love.

There is work to be done. Almost all of it is internal to us. The five prepared virgins and the strangers who brought a wedding garment will be those who keep the covenant. It is designed to give birth to a new society, new culture, and permit a new civilization to be founded.

STEPHANIE: So, in Mark chapter five, verses 44 and ~~43~~ [45] (And you have to excuse me. I have had a terrible cold, and so forgive whatever comes out):

*And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment...? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is: Listen, and hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. And the second is like [unto] this: You shall love your neighbor **as yourself**. There is no other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said unto Him, Well, Master, you have said the truth; for there is one God, and there is none other but him. And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbor **as himself**, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. ([Emphasis added.] Mark 5:44-45 RE; see also Mark 12:28-33)*

So, the question is, "What is this thing about loving yourself?" 'Kay? I'm not sure, but let's take a look at it. So, I'm wondering if God gives *love your neighbor as yourself* as the second great commandment because He thinks we're all egomaniacal narcissists, and the only possible way we're able to love *other people* is if we love them as much as we love ourselves? Yes? No, I don't think so. Because there are plenty of examples of people who

are literally selfless people, and who give up their lives and everything they have for other people. So, that can't be it.

So, let's start with Romans 6:5:

Therefore, owe no man anything but to love one another, for he that loves another has fulfilled the law for this: You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, You shall not covet; and if there is any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying — namely, You shall love your neighbor as yourself (love works no ill to his neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law) and that, knowing the time — that now...is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. (Romans 1:65 RE; see also Romans 13:8-11)

Did you all catch that? If there is any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in the command to *love your neighbor as yourself*. If you love God and your neighbor, the other eight commandments take care of themselves because people who love each other work no ill to their neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law and our salvation is nearer than when we believed. So it is, quite literally, time to wake up.

The foregoing excerpts are taken from:

- Denver's *Christian Reformation Lecture Series*, Talk #7, given in Boise, Idaho, on November 3, 2018,
- Denver's remarks entitled "Book of Mormon as Covenant," given at the Book of Mormon Covenant Conference in Columbia, South Carolina, on January 13, 2019,
- Denver's conference talk entitled "Civilization," given in Grand Junction, Colorado, on April 21, 2019, and
- Stephanie Snuffer's remarks entitled "Love Others As Yourself," given at a regional conference in Sandy, Utah, on July 14, 2019.