



*The Savior showing compassion toward a woman taken in adultery (see John 8:1–11).
“Christ said He came to call sinners to repentance, to save them,”
Joseph Smith declared.*



The Power of Forgiving

*“Come on, dear brother, since the war is past,
For friends at first, are friends again at last.”*

From the Life of Joseph Smith

In the summer of 1839, the Prophet gave the name *Nauvoo* to the site where the Saints were gathering on the Illinois side of the Mississippi River. The name was of Hebrew origin, signifying “a beautiful situation, or place, carrying with it, also, the idea of rest.”¹ Under the Prophet’s direction, the Saints began transforming the village of Commerce into a lovely city. They first replaced their huts and tents with frontier log homes, and then numbers of frame houses and substantial brick homes began to appear. They planted fruit and shade trees and vines and bushes to beautify their large lots. In their beautiful Nauvoo, the Saints hoped to find a peaceful place of refuge where they could put the persecutions of Missouri behind them.

During this time of building, Joseph Smith had an experience that showed his merciful temperament and willingness to forgive others, allowing them to move beyond the wrongs of the past. Daniel Tyler recounted the experience:

“A man who had stood high in the Church while in Far West [Missouri], was taken down with chills or ague and fever. While his mind as well as body was weak, disaffected parties soured his mind and persuaded him to leave the Saints and go with them. He gave some testimony against the Prophet. While the Saints were settling in Commerce, having recovered from his illness, he removed from Missouri to Quincy, Illinois. There he went to work chopping cordwood to obtain means to take himself and family to Nauvoo, and [give] a present to the injured man of God if, per-adventure, he would forgive and permit him to return to the fold. . . . He felt that there was salvation nowhere else for him

and if that was denied him all was lost as far as he was concerned. He started with a sorrowful heart and downcast look.

“While [the man was] on the way the Lord told Brother Joseph he was coming. The Prophet looked out of the window and saw him coming up the street. As soon as he turned to open the gate the Prophet sprang up from his chair and ran and met him in the yard, exclaiming, ‘O Brother —, how glad I am to see you!’ He caught him around the neck and both wept like children.

“Suffice it to say that proper restitution was made and the fallen man again entered the Church by the door, received his Priesthood again, went upon several important missions, gathered with the Saints in Zion and died in full faith.”²

George Q. Cannon, who served as a counselor in the First Presidency, gave further evidence of Joseph Smith’s forgiving nature: “With his staunch advocacy of truth, and his unyielding adherence to the commandments of God, Joseph was ever merciful to the weak and the erring. During the summer of 1835, he was laboring in councils and meetings in Kirtland and vicinity, and was chosen to take part in the proceedings against several members who were to be tried for utterances made against the Presidency of the Church. Whether it fell to his lot to plead the cause of the accused or to prosecute, though he himself might have been the one who was wronged, he acted with so much tenderness and justice that he won the love of all.”³

Teachings of Joseph Smith

We are to exercise the principle of mercy and forgive our brothers and sisters.

“One of the most pleasing scenes that can occur on earth, when a sin has been committed by one person against another, is, to forgive that sin; and then according to the sublime and perfect pattern of the Savior, pray to our Father in heaven to forgive [the sinner] also.”⁴

“Ever keep in exercise the principle of mercy, and be ready to forgive our brother on the first intimations of repentance, and asking forgiveness; and should we even forgive our brother, or

even our enemy, before he repent or ask forgiveness, our heavenly Father would be equally as merciful unto us.”⁵

“Bear and forbear one with another, for so the Lord does with us. Pray for your enemies in the Church and curse not your foes without: for vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, and I will repay [see Romans 12:19]. To every ordained member, and to all, we say, be merciful and you shall find mercy. Seek to help save souls, not to destroy them: for verily you know, that ‘there is more joy in heaven, over one sinner that repents, than there is over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance.’ [See Luke 15:7.]”⁶

Eliza R. Snow reported these words of the Prophet: “[The Saints] should be armed with mercy, notwithstanding the iniquity among us. Said he had been instrumental in bringing iniquity to light—it was a melancholy thought and awful that so many should place themselves under the condemnation of the devil, and going to perdition. With deep feeling he said that they are fellow mortals, we loved them once, shall we not encourage them to reformation? We have not [yet] forgiven them seventy times seven, as our Savior directed [see Matthew 18:21–22]; perhaps we have not forgiven them once. There is now a day of salvation to such as repent and reform.”⁷

“Suppose that Jesus Christ and holy angels should object to us on frivolous things, what would become of us? We must be merciful to one another, and overlook small things.”⁸

Willard Richards, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, reported: “Joseph remarked that all was well between him and the heavens; that he had no enmity against any one; and as the prayer of Jesus, or his pattern, so prayed Joseph—‘Father, forgive me my trespasses as I forgive those who trespass against me’ [see Matthew 6:12, 14], for I freely forgive all men. If we would secure and cultivate the love of others, we must love others, even our enemies as well as friends.”⁹

Forgiving restores unity of feeling.

“It grieves me that there is no fuller fellowship; if one member suffer all feel it; by union of feeling we obtain power with

God. Christ said He came to call sinners to repentance, to save them. Christ was condemned by the self-righteous Jews because He took sinners into His society; He took them upon the principle that they repented of their sins. . . . If [sinners] repent, we are bound to take them, and by kindness sanctify and cleanse them from all unrighteousness by our influence in watching over them. . . . Nothing is so much calculated to lead people to forsake sin as to take them by the hand, and watch over them with tenderness.”¹⁰

The Prophet Joseph Smith wrote to a group of Church leaders: “Now, brethren, let me tell you, that it is my disposition to give and forgive, and to bear and to forbear, with all long-suffering and patience, with the foibles, follies, weaknesses, and wickedness of my brethren and all the world of mankind; and my confidence and love toward you is not slackened, nor weakened. And now, if you should be called upon to bear with us a little in any of our weaknesses and follies, and should, with us, receive a rebuke to yourselves, don’t be offended. . . . When you and I meet face to face, I anticipate, without the least doubt, that all matters between us will be fairly understood, and perfect love prevail; and the sacred covenant by which we are bound together, have the uppermost seat in our hearts.”¹¹

The Prophet Joseph Smith said the following at a meeting with his counselors in the First Presidency and the Twelve: “I have sometimes spoken too harshly from the impulse of the moment, and inasmuch as I have wounded your feelings, brethren, I ask your forgiveness, for I love you and will hold you up with all my heart in all righteousness, before the Lord, and before all men; for be assured, brethren, I am willing to stem the torrent of all opposition, in storms and in tempests, in thunders and in lightnings, by sea and by land, in the wilderness or among false brethren, or mobs, or wherever God in His providence may call us. And I am determined that neither heights nor depths, principalities nor powers, things present or things to come, or any other creature, shall separate me from you [see Romans 8:38–39].

“And I will now covenant with you before God, that I will not listen to or credit any derogatory report against any of you, nor

condemn you upon any testimony beneath the heavens, short of that testimony which is infallible, until I can see you face to face, and know of a surety; and I do place unremitted confidence in your word, for I believe you to be men of truth. And I ask the same of you, when I tell you anything, that you place equal confidence in my word, for I will not tell you I know anything that I do not know.”¹²

In the fall of 1835, the Prophet's brother William disagreed with a decision the Prophet had made, became enraged, and began to treat the Prophet with contempt and encourage others to do the same. This behavior grieved the Prophet, and he wrote the following to William: “I desire, Brother William, that you will humble yourself. I freely forgive you, and you know my unshaken and unchangeable disposition; I know in whom I trust; I stand upon the rock; the floods cannot, no, they shall not, overthrow me. You know the doctrine I teach is true, you know that God has blessed me. . . . You know that it is my duty to admonish you, when you do wrong. This liberty I shall always take, and you shall have the same privilege. I take the liberty to admonish you, because of my birthright; and I grant you the privilege, because it is my duty to be humble, and receive rebuke and instruction from a brother, or a friend. . . .

“And now may God have mercy upon my father's house; may God take away enmity from between me and thee; and may all blessings be restored, and the past be forgotten forever. May humble repentance bring us both to Thee, O God, and to Thy power and protection, and a crown, to enjoy the society of father, mother, Alvin, Hyrum, Sophronia, Samuel, Catherine, Carlos, Lucy, the Saints, and all the sanctified in peace, forever, is the prayer of your brother.”¹³

On January 1, 1836, the Prophet said the following about his efforts to resolve this difficulty in his family: “Notwithstanding the gratitude that fills my heart on retrospecting the past year, and the multiplied blessings that have crowned our heads, my heart is pained within me, because of the difficulty that exists in my father's family. . . . I am determined that nothing on my part shall be lacking to adjust and amicably dispose of and settle all

family difficulties on this day, that the ensuing year and years, be they few or many, may be spent in righteousness before God. . . .

“Brothers William and Hyrum, and Uncle John Smith, came to my house, and we went into a room by ourselves, in company with father and Elder Martin Harris. Father Smith then opened our interview by prayer, after which he expressed himself on the occasion in a very feeling and pathetic manner, even with all the sympathy of a father, whose feelings were deeply wounded on account of the difficulty that was existing in the family; and while he addressed us, the Spirit of God rested down upon us in mighty power, and our hearts were melted. Brother William made a humble confession and asked my forgiveness for the abuse he had offered me. And wherein I had been out of the way, I asked his forgiveness.

“And the spirit of confession and forgiveness was mutual among us all, and we covenanted with each other, in the sight of God, and the holy angels, and the brethren, to strive thenceforward to build each other up in righteousness in all things, and not listen to evil reports concerning each other; but, like brothers indeed, go to each other, with our grievances, in the spirit of meekness, and be reconciled, and thereby promote our happiness, and the happiness of the family, and, in short, the happiness and well-being of all. My wife and mother and my scribe were then called in, and we repeated the covenant to them that we had entered into; and while gratitude swelled our bosoms, tears flowed from our eyes. I was then requested to close our interview, which I did, with prayer; and it was truly a jubilee and time of rejoicing.”¹⁴

**By showing long-suffering, patience, and mercy to
the repentant, we can help bring them into
“the liberty of God’s dear children.”**

In late 1838, William W. Phelps, who had been a trusted Church member, was among those who bore false testimony against the Prophet and other Church leaders, leading to their imprisonment in Missouri. In June 1840, Brother Phelps wrote to Joseph Smith, pleading for forgiveness. The Prophet Joseph replied: “I must say that it is with no ordinary feelings I endeavor to write



William W. Phelps, portrayed here with Joseph Smith after returning to full fellowship with the Saints, wrote of the Prophet who had so freely forgiven him: "Praise to the man who communed with Jehovah!" (Hymns, no. 27).

a few lines to you in answer to yours of the 29th [of last month]; at the same time I am rejoiced at the privilege granted me.

"You may in some measure realize what my feelings, as well as Elder Rigdon's and Brother Hyrum's were, when we read your letter—truly our hearts were melted into tenderness and compassion when we ascertained your resolves, etc. I can assure you I feel a disposition to act on your case in a manner that will meet the approbation of Jehovah, (whose servant I am), and agreeable to the principles of truth and righteousness which have been revealed; and inasmuch as long-suffering, patience, and mercy have ever characterized the dealings of our heavenly Father towards

the humble and penitent, I feel disposed to copy the example, cherish the same principles, and by so doing be a savior of my fellow men.

“It is true, that we have suffered much in consequence of your behavior—the cup of gall, already full enough for mortals to drink, was indeed filled to overflowing when you turned against us, one with whom we had oft taken sweet counsel together, and enjoyed many refreshing seasons from the Lord—‘had it been an enemy, we could have borne it.’ [See Psalm 55:12–14.] ‘In the day that thou stoodest on the other side, in the day when strangers carried away captive his forces, and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots upon [Far West], even thou wast as one of them; but thou shouldest not have looked on the day of thy brother, in the day that he became a stranger, neither shouldest thou have spoken proudly in the day of distress.’ [See Obadiah 1:11–12.]

“However, the cup has been drunk, the will of our Father has been done, and we are yet alive, for which we thank the Lord. And having been delivered from the hands of wicked men by the mercy of our God, we say it is your privilege to be delivered from the powers of the adversary, be brought into the liberty of God’s dear children, and again take your stand among the Saints of the Most High, and by diligence, humility, and love unfeigned, commend yourself to our God, and your God, and to the Church of Jesus Christ.

“Believing your confession to be real, and your repentance genuine, I shall be happy once again to give you the right hand of fellowship, and rejoice over the returning prodigal.

“Your letter was read to the Saints last Sunday, and an expression of their feeling was taken, when it was unanimously resolved, that W. W. Phelps should be received into fellowship.

“ ‘Come on, dear brother, since the war is past,
For friends at first, are friends again at last.’ ”¹⁵

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Consider these ideas as you study the chapter or as you prepare to teach. For additional help, see pages vii–xii.

- This chapter includes several accounts of Joseph Smith forgiving others. Review these accounts on pages 391–92, 395–96, and 396–98. In what ways might these stories help someone who is struggling to forgive another?
- What blessings come into our lives when we forgive those who have offended us? Why do we sometimes have difficulty forgiving others? What can we do to develop a more forgiving spirit?
- Page 393 contains brief, wise statements about forgiving others. For example: “Bear and forbear one with another, for so the Lord does with us.” “Be merciful and you shall find mercy.” “Seek to help save souls, not to destroy them.” “We must be merciful to one another, and overlook small things.” What do you gain from each of these statements?
- In the paragraph that begins on the bottom of page 393, review the Prophet Joseph Smith’s words about the effect of kindness and tenderness. Why do you think this counsel is true? How have you experienced these principles in your own life?
- Review the paragraph that begins on the bottom of page 394. What problems might we avoid as we follow this counsel? Why is this counsel sometimes difficult to follow? How can we overcome the temptation to believe negative reports about others?
- In his efforts to forgive others, the Prophet spoke of his desire to “copy the example” of Heavenly Father (page 398) and live “according to the sublime and perfect pattern of the Savior” (page 392). As we strive to follow the example of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, what are some characteristics we should strive to develop?

Related Scriptures: Psalm 86:5; Matthew 18:21–35; 1 Nephi 7:16–21; Mosiah 26:29–31; D&C 64:9–11

Notes

1. *History of the Church*, 4:268; from a letter from Joseph Smith and his counselors in the First Presidency to the Saints, Jan. 15, 1841, Nauvoo, Illinois, published in *Times and Seasons*, Jan. 15, 1841, pp. 273–74.
2. Daniel Tyler, in “Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith,” *Juvenile Instructor*, Aug. 15, 1892, p. 491; punctuation modernized; paragraph divisions altered.
3. George Q. Cannon, *The Life of Joseph Smith, the Propbet* (1888), pp. 190–91.
4. *History of the Church*, 6:245; from “A Friendly Hint to Missouri,” an article written under the direction of Joseph Smith, Mar. 8, 1844, Nauvoo, Illinois, published in *Times and Seasons*, Mar. 15, 1844, p. 473.
5. *History of the Church*, 3:383; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on July 2, 1839, in Montrose, Iowa; reported by Wilford Woodruff and Willard Richards.
6. *History of the Church*, 2:230, footnote; from “To the Saints Scattered Abroad,” *Messenger and Advocate*, June 1835, p. 138.
7. *History of the Church*, 5:19–20; bracketed word “yet” in original; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on May 26, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Eliza R. Snow.
8. *History of the Church*, 5:23; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on June 9, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Eliza R. Snow.
9. *History of the Church*, 5:498; punctuation modernized; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on July 9, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.
10. *History of the Church*, 5:23–24; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on June 9, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Eliza R. Snow.
11. Letter from Joseph Smith to Edward Partridge and others, Mar. 30, 1834, Kirtland, Ohio; in Oliver Cowdery Letterbook, pp. 34–35, Huntington Library, San Marino, California; copy in Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
12. *History of the Church*, 2:374; paragraph divisions altered; from the minutes of a council meeting of the First Presidency and the Twelve held on Jan. 16, 1836, in Kirtland, Ohio; reported by Warren Parrish.
13. *History of the Church*, 2:343; from a letter from Joseph Smith to William Smith, Dec. 18, 1835, Kirtland, Ohio.
14. *History of the Church*, 2:352–54; paragraph divisions altered; from a Joseph Smith journal entry, Jan. 1, 1836, Kirtland, Ohio.
15. *History of the Church*, 4:162–64; second set of bracketed words in third paragraph in original; punctuation and capitalization modernized; paragraph divisions altered; italics deleted; from a letter from Joseph Smith to William W. Phelps, July 22, 1840, Nauvoo, Illinois.