

# Good Government Begins with Self-Government

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## Good Government Requires Goodness

For nearly a thousand years (from around 960 to 1905 CE), becoming a government official in imperial China required passing a battery of multiday, multisubject, anonymously graded written exams requiring decades of intensive preparation.<sup>1</sup> Eighteenth-century European political thinkers, including Voltaire, admired China's system for using meritocratic criteria, as opposed to aristocratic birth, to select government officials.<sup>2</sup> The exams tested not only scholars' abilities in history, philosophy, government, and literature, but also—in theory at least—their personal cultivation of moral virtues such as benevolence and integrity. Good government required goodness.

Chinese children as young as six or seven began their education by committing a body of Confucian classical texts to memory, a mental feat akin to American first graders learning to recite, in Latin, the entire text of the Book of Psalms and the New Testament. One of the very first

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1. Benjamin A. Elman, "Political, Social, and Cultural Reproduction via Civil Service Examinations in Late Imperial China," *Journal of Asian Studies* 50, no. 1 (February, 1991): 7–28; Jacques Gernet, *Daily Life in China on the Eve of the Mongol Invasion 1250–1276*, trans. H. M. Wright (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1962), 65. In this patriarchal system, only men could be appointed to government posts.

2. Stefan Gaarsmand Jacobsen, "Prussian Emulations of a Chinese Meritocratic Ideal? Early Modern Europe Debating How China Selected Civil Servants," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38, no. 3 (September 2014): 425–41; Ssu-yü Teng, "Chinese Influence on the Western Examination System," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 7, no. 4 (September 1943): 267–312, esp. 281.

Confucian classics that maturing scholars studied in depth was a relatively short text called *The Great Learning* (daxue 大學), dating to about the third century BCE. Robert Eno, a contemporary scholar of Confucianism, describes *The Great Learning* as “a beginner’s handbook in how to perfect oneself ethically and become capable of transforming the world into a universal utopia.”<sup>3</sup>

The optimistic view of the potential and power of human self-cultivation in *The Great Learning* stands alongside Joseph Smith’s inspired teachings of the ability of God’s children to learn and grow eternally into the stature of their Father and Mother in Heaven.<sup>4</sup> The influential opening passages of *The Great Learning* state that those who wish to transform the world for good cannot accomplish this without paying attention to smaller tasks: “In ancient times those who wished to make bright virtue brilliant in the world first ordered their countries; those who wished to order their countries first aligned their families; those who wished to align their families first cultivated themselves.”<sup>5</sup>

*The Great Learning* teaches that only as the self is cultivated can individuals gain the capacity and influence to transform the wider social circles around them: the family, the country, and eventually, the world. “When one’s self is cultivated, one’s family may be aligned; when one’s family is aligned, one’s country may be ordered; when one’s country is ordered, the world may be set at peace.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Self-Government Disciplines the Natural Self**

*The Great Learning*’s ancient insight that good government begins with self-government stands alongside the Savior’s teachings in the Gospels. Acknowledging the human tendency to focus on others’ flaws instead of confronting our own, Jesus asked: “Why do you look at the splinter in the eye of your brother or sister and do not consider the log in your own eye? Or how do you say to your brother or sister, ‘Let me take the splinter out of your eye,’ when there is a log in your own eye? Hypocrite, first take the

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3. Robert Eno, “The Great Learning and The Doctrine of the Mean: An Online Teaching Translation,” June 2016, version 1.0, p. 7, <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2022/23422/Daxue-Zhongyong.pdf>.

4. See “Mother in Heaven,” Gospel Topics Essay, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed November 17, 2021, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/mother-in-heaven?lang=eng>.

5. My translation is based on Robert Eno’s translation; see note 3.

6. My translation is based on Robert Eno’s translation; see note 3.

log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly the splinter in the eye of your brother or sister.”<sup>7</sup>

Here, Jesus’s use of the word *hypocrite* stings. We do not want to be in this position, and the way to avoid it is to do things in the proper order. To see others clearly, we must first address our own flaws and biases. Even after we have cleared our vision, taking things out of other people’s eyes is an intimate, sensitive undertaking. Without proper communication, well-meaning efforts to remove splinters become painful jabs in the eye.

Jesus gave us the Golden Rule, based on the teachings of ancient Judaism. The Golden Rule can be found within nearly every other religion. When a disciple of Confucius asked, “Is there any one word that can serve as a principle for the conduct of life?” Confucius replied, “Perhaps the word ‘reciprocity’: Do not do to others what you would not want others to do to you.”<sup>8</sup> We Latter-day Saints have repeated these basic Christian teachings in countless Sunday lessons, sung them in hymns, located them within seconds in annual youth scripture-chase competitions. And yet so often, we Latter-day Saints, myself included, succumb to the temptation to participate in the eye-jabbing political partisanship, cultural contentions, and sneering incivility of our time.

In “the real world” of political competition, some might argue that achieving concrete political wins is necessary and more important than adhering to philosophical ideals or following scriptural injunctions, even if they came from Jesus. “Politics is a dirty business, and one has to fight dirty,” friends have said. The prophet Nephi, observing the temptations of the last days, captured this attitude precisely when describing how people might justify unethical actions: “[God] will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this. . . . Yea, and there shall be many which shall teach after this manner, false and vain and foolish doctrines, and shall be puffed up in their hearts” (2 Ne. 28:8–9). Of course, quoting scripture to support why “they” are wrong and “I” am righteous is the oldest trick in the book. It is also the oldest *mistake* in the book too, because, as *The Great Learning* and the teachings of Christ

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7. Matthew 7:3–5. I am using Thomas Wayment’s translation of the New Testament for Latter-day Saints. Thomas A. Wayment, *The New Testament: A Translation for Latter-day Saints, a Study Bible* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2019).

8. “Selections from the Analects,” in *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, comp. William Theodore de Bary, Wing-tsit Chan, and Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 27 [15:23].

have pointed out, the way to bring about righteousness in the world is to look inward.

Priorities in good government all come down to a question of whether what we Latter-day Saints teach our children in Primary, or what missionaries teach investigators, is really an eternal truth, or just a platitude: *Are we really children of God? Is every human being really a beloved spirit child of heavenly parents, created in their image, possessing their divine nature and potential?*

### **The Truth of Our Relationships**

If we are all children of God, then no matter where we live, no matter under which form of government we live (democratic, authoritarian, theocratic, oligarchic, and so forth) or with whom we live (among our political rivals or among our political “tribe”), all national or political affiliations must be subordinated to the truth of this relationship. Christ taught us to love “enemies” who cursed us and persecuted us, because, in fact, we and they are all children of God. Within God’s universe, the true things that will not pass away, even after suns collapse and cease to shine, are not political platforms or government policies, which change with time and place, but relationships between eternal intelligences. If we are all children of God, then it is political platforms that have to be theoretical and relationships that have to be concrete.

A principle of Confucianism is “the rectification of names” (zhengming 正名), which means seeking to embody the roles and responsibilities inherent in our names, titles, and relationships. A mother and father should love, guide, and nurture. A teacher should transmit wisdom and cultivate potential. A student should respectfully receive teachings and be diligent in her study.

What do healthy relationships between sisters and brothers look like? The divine relationship with our siblings, the fellow children of God, supersedes all other earthly roles (in the eternal scheme of things, even parents and children are siblings). This fundamental peerdom, radically egalitarian against the backdrop of the world’s hierarchies and classes, underpins Christ’s basic teachings on how human beings should relate to each other:

“In all things, do the same to others as you desire them to do to you” (Matt. 7:12; see also 3 Ne. 14:12).

“Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:39; see also Deut. 5:14).

These teachings were given not only to people in ancient Israel but also to the peoples of the Book of Mormon. Alma, the priest who quit

the government of the corrupt King Noah and refused to accept a kingship himself because of the unrighteous hierarchy it might create, taught “that every man should love his neighbor as himself” (Mosiah 23:15). When the resurrected Christ visited the Nephites, Lamanites, Anti-Nephi-Lehis, and other peoples of that land, he repeated these basic teachings (see 3 Ne. 14:2–12).

### Christ’s Most Basic Commandments Are the Hardest to Follow

Jesus’s basic teachings on loving our fellow beings, even those who seem extremely unlovable, put us in a difficult situation with regard to government and self-government. How can we love our political “enemies,” especially when the real-world consequences of losing seem so high? How can we pray for the welfare of those who seem bent on destroying ours? How can the Savior ask us to look at the people we most despise and see him in their place?

One example of the strength of the temptation to contentious incivility from my own neighborhood was when unruly protesters—many of whom were undoubtedly Latter-day Saints because of our majority presence in the local population—disrupted a school board meeting to express their opposition to mask wearing. Protestors ignored the rules of order, shouted and chanted to drown out board members trying to conduct the meeting, and rushed up to the front of the room to seize equipment and accost board members. One example of political partisanship from my own mind was the election-season afternoon I drove past a group of adults and children waving campaign posters on a busy corner. *Idiots*, I snarled in my head. *Losers*. Without even knowing them, I fantasized about pulling over and shouting, “You’re pathetic! You’re turning our country into garbage!” In the most unfortunate examples in recent memory, Latter-day Saints have even participated in violent insurrection, intimidated medical and health-care workers, or made threats against others’ lives.<sup>9</sup>

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9. Larry D. Curtis, “Man Photographed Hanging from Senate Balcony Identified as Religious Idaho Man,” KJZZ, January 8, 2021, <https://kjzz.com/news/local/man-photographed-hanging-from-senate-balcony-identified-as-religious-idaho-man>; Amy Donaldson, “Anti-mask Protestors Target State Epidemiologist Dr. Angela Dunn,” Deseret News, <https://www.deseret.com/utah/2020/10/29/21540624/anti-mask-protesters-target-state-epidemiologist-dr-angela-dunn>; Maggie Baska, “Gay Mormon Student Sent Death Threats after Being Labelled ‘Anti-Christ’ by Professor,” Yahoo News, <https://uk.news.yahoo.com/gay-mormon-student-sent-death-16463369.html>.

Alas, these are not the finest moments of people who have made sacred covenants to follow Jesus Christ and join him in bearing the burdens of God's children. Does this mean that Jesus's teachings lack power? That the restored gospel is weak sauce? That we Latter-day Saints are all talk and no walk?

What I think it means is that we must renew our commitment to the Savior's most basic, elementary teachings on how to treat our fellow beings. What is the point of extolling the "fullness" of an ongoing Restoration—such as the beautiful temples dotting the earth, additional testaments of Christ in latter-day scripture, and so on—if we ignore Christ's most fundamental, oft-repeated, easy-to-understand commandments? We definitely don't want to be deserving of the Savior's criticism of the established religious leaders in his community who honored the letter but not the spirit of the law. "You tithe a tenth of the mint and the dill and the cumin, and have neglected the weightier things of the law, the judgment and the mercy and the faith," he said. "Blind guides, who strain out the gnat but drink down the camel" (Matt. 23:34–24).<sup>10</sup>

### Basic Tests

It's not that we don't want to follow Jesus. But it's so easy to get carried away. This is why Jesus repeatedly warned that there would be those who called him "Lord, Lord" and would think they were wonderful but were actually disregarding his teachings and jabbing his people in the eye (see Matt. 7:21–23; 25:34–45). Luckily, the scriptures supply us with some basic tests we can use to measure our actions and make course corrections.<sup>11</sup> *This is the crucial point:* These are not tests to share in Sunday School, when we are all sitting together in rows, wearing nice clothes. They are tests to apply in one's heart for every action, including every post on social media, every link we share, every interaction with random strangers, every vote, and every tense conversation:

**Basic Test #1, Substitution** (Matt. 7:12; 3 Ne. 14:12): How would I like to be treated if I were in \_\_\_\_\_'s place and \_\_\_\_\_ were in mine?

**Basic Test #2, My Standard of Respect** (Matt. 22:39; Mosiah 23:15): What would show \_\_\_\_\_ the same love and respect I expect for myself?

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10. Translation from David Bentley Hart, *The New Testament: A Translation* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2017), 47.

11. See Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Daily Restoration," *Liahona* 45, no. 11 (November 2021): 77–79.

**Basic Test #3, When Do I Say “No” to God?** (Mosiah 2:17): Serving others = serving God. Declining to serve others = declining to serve God. Are there any particular groups of people I find myself especially disliking and therefore reluctant to serve? What can I do in order to make myself more useful to them and therefore more useful in God’s service?

**Basic Test #4, The Lowest of the Low** (Matt. 25:34–45): When you read the following sentence, putting yourself in the position of “I,” who comes to mind?

*I would be delighted if this most horrible person lost their job, suffered public humiliation, and developed painful, oozing sores for two weeks:*

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Who popped up in your mind? A despised politician? A workplace nemesis? A loud-mouthed presence on social media? An ex-family member? The perpetrator of an awful crime? Now instead fill in the blank as Jesus has instructed us to do: with his name. “As you did this to one of the least of my brothers or sisters,” he explained, “you have done it to me” (Matt. 25:40). In helping us understand “the least of these,” he gave some examples—the malnourished strangers needing hospitality, those struggling with illness, and prisoners. The last example, convicted criminals, is telling. Jesus didn’t say, “I was wrongfully accused in prison, waiting to be exonerated, and you visited me,” although it is certainly likely that people in such situations could be found in Roman prisons. He said he was also there among people who had made huge moral mistakes and harmed others and who were possibly completely unrepentant (Matt. 25:34–45). “The least of these” can mean “the lowest of the low.”

This sort of arduous human-to-human engagement is a fundamental task that Jesus gave his disciples. Here are some more “test questions,” beyond the scriptural diagnostics, that might help us do a better job at being sisters and brothers dedicated to supporting and influencing each other, instead of enemies and fools dedicated to destroying and undermining each other:

- What kinds of experiences have others had that shape their different choices?
- Do I know of their experiences and the cultural context of their lives?
- What could I do to acquire understanding of these others’ cultures on their own terms and in their own contexts (not as presented by people who dislike them)?
- Could I summarize their specific concerns regarding a political issue in a way they would recognize as fair and accurate?

- Am I aware of the good they do in their world, the people who depend on them, and the time they spend in service?
- Do I compare my strengths with their weakness, my awareness with their ignorance, my competence with their struggles, my most-emphasized value with their least-emphasized value?

When I apply these tests and questions, I discover my “righteous indignation” is half-baked. When I take some time to think about it, I realize people with such “opposite” views in my family and circle of friends are some of the best people I know. I also discover that I’m not the greatest example—more like the example of “what not to do.”

In one dialogue from a Confucian text on good government dating to around the fourth century BCE, the king of Liang consulted with the philosopher Mencius. “I don’t understand why more people aren’t coming to live in my kingdom,” the king complained. “I do indeed exert the utmost effort in their care. If it’s a bad year on this side of the river, I evacuate as many as I can to the east side and also send relief grain. If it’s a bad year on the east side of the river, I do the same thing. None of the other kings in the neighboring kingdoms does what I do.”<sup>12</sup>

“Since your majesty is fond of war, let me use an example from war,” replied Mencius. “The soldiers move forward to the beat of drums, but as soon as the weapons clash together, they throw down their armor and flee, trailing their weapons behind them. Some run a hundred steps and then stop; others run fifty steps and then stop. The fifty-steppers mock the hundred-steppers. What do you think of this?”

“They can’t mock,” said the king. “They didn’t go a hundred steps, but they still ran.”

“You, your Majesty, are a fifty-stepper,” said Mencius. He then enumerated the many tasks of good government, such as doing agricultural work in season, protecting fisheries from depletion, protecting forests from overharvesting, planting mulberry trees for silkworms, opening granaries to the hungry. Although the king prided himself on accomplishing the single task of transporting people and grain during famines, there were many other ways in which he had failed to do work his people needed. Worst of all, the king blamed hunger in his kingdom on a “bad year” instead of on his own lack of action.<sup>13</sup>

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12. My translation and paraphrase is based on the translation in the online Chinese Text Project: James Legge, trans., “Liang Hui Wang I,” Chinese Text Project, accessed November 17, 2021, <https://ctext.org/mengzi/liang-hui-wang-i>.

13. Legge, “Liang Hui Wang I.”

All of us are, in some sense, fifty-steppers. We may be great at attending to certain problems in public education, or family structures, or racial and social justice, or climate change, or fiscal reform, or environmental degradation, or any of the many urgent moral and existential issues of our time. But we all have limitations. On at least a few counts, every one of us makes some big problems worse, not better.

Instead of undermining or discrediting each other, we can acknowledge that the world is full of problems and everyone has distinctive perspectives, talents, and energies to apply to them. Everyone should be allowed to be multidimensional. Even in the realm of political competition, we can seek to persuade our sisters and brothers in a way that demonstrates respect for their motivations and effort. We will never be able to influence people if they perceive that we don't understand or respect them.

### Meanings of “Self”

Here I want to be clear about three things with regard to cultivating the “self”:

1. We don't have to feel responsible for singlehandedly transforming the world all at once. King Benjamin said, “And see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that [people] should run faster than [they] have strength” (Mosiah 4:27). This caution is especially important for those for whom engaging in some public spaces means risking threats and actual physical harm, particularly members of marginalized groups. The responsibility for reform in *good* governance should fall most heavily on those at the apex of systems of power, such as systems of authority, money, cultural influence, and so on.
2. There is nothing wrong with engaging enthusiastically in political processes such as debates or elections. There is something magical about how individual people come together to form larger communities that work to bring about change in the world around them. There's also something magical when people from both sides of an issue come together to compromise and secure the common good. The Lord encourages people to be “anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness” (D&C 58:27). However, the Epistle of James also warns that we should be “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. For human wrath does not accomplish God's righteousness” (James 1:19–20). In victory, we can be generous; in defeat, gracious.

3. “Self-government” takes on an additional meaning where democratic systems are concerned, because leaders are chosen from among the people themselves. “We the people,” the governors and the governed, are one body—not just Labour, Greens, Republicans, or Christian Democrats, nor any sort of identity category. Within a given democratic country and system, all people make up the national self. Supporting harm to or suppression of any group within a national system is self-harm and self-suppression. When the hand gets a wound, we don’t ignore it because the feet are fine. In this spirit, President Dallin H. Oaks recently taught, “Of course Black lives matter! That is an eternal truth all reasonable people should support.”<sup>14</sup>

We Latter-day Saints are among the world’s most enthusiastic when it comes to expanding our personal liabilities by expanding the size of the “body” to which we belong. We energetically undertake the distance-and-death-defying project of sealing families together, uniting not only parents and children but also spouses, great-uncles, and cousins from Canada to Colombia. We send out tens of thousands of missionaries speaking languages including Ilocano, Indonesian, and Italian to invite people to join us in covenants that not only reach upward to heaven but also outward as we shoulder the burdens of our fellow beings. The global burdens we are hastening to bear include poverty, violence, corruption, materialism, and popular falsehoods. The Latter-day Saint “self” extends beyond national boundaries, beyond types of physical bodies, and includes sisters and brothers through all generations and throughout all the earth.

This is why, though we may have differing views about immigration policy, Latter-day Saints do not scoff at refugees or engage in racist denigrations of immigrants from other countries any more than we would scoff at Mary and Joseph in Egypt or denigrate the Savior when he comes to us as a stranger. If we really despised association with our fellow sisters and brothers from certain other countries, what would be the point of doing missionary and temple work, which ties us into covenant relationships much longer lasting than political ones? This is why, though we may have differing views of social policy or tax policy, we do not dismiss whole groups of people as inherently villainous or evil. Are God’s children really endowed with dignity and holiness, or not?

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14. Dallin H. Oaks, Brigham Young University devotional, October 27, 2020, <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/dallin-h-oaks/racism-other-challenges/>.

## Good Government Begins with Self-Government

*The Great Learning*'s insight into how a person may change the world helps clarify both the quality and the scale of the Savior's teachings. Our discipleship, or *discipline*, begins with the self-restraint required to avoid the nearly irresistible tendency to blame and judge others. It begins when we do the uncomfortable work of cultivating humility, patience, and greater awareness of our own biases and blind spots.

As my uncle Professor Charles Inouye recently pointed out in a lecture at the Church History Department in Salt Lake City, the spirit of Elijah is the spirit of knitting generations and peoples together across human-made divisions, separations, and factions. It is the spirit of anti-racism and inclusion, gathering in all of the family of God (see Mal. 4; see also Moses 7:32–33).

Latter-day Saints have earned a popular reputation for self-discipline when it comes to food, drink, sleep, and sex. We must extend this reputation for self-discipline to civic conduct and interpersonal interaction. Sometimes in Sunday School, people mistakenly repeat King Benjamin's warning about "the natural self" as if it were a warning against the desires of the flesh.<sup>15</sup> As a matter of fact, Benjamin presents the natural self as the opposite of five qualities that have nothing to do with carnal desires and everything to do with how we behave in *relationships* with God and our fellow beings. Fighting the natural self means learning to be "submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love" (Mosiah 3:19). The natural self threatens to have its way in the knee-jerk reaction, the impulse to dominate a discussion, or the exhilarating momentum of the online or in-person mob.

The tools for our project of self-governance are already at hand. In their recent book, *Proclaim Peace*, Latter-day Saint scholars Patrick Mason and David Pulsipher declare that Latter-day Saints "are part of a potentially powerful but often overlooked resource for community-based peacebuilding."<sup>16</sup> The authors playfully propose a "Just Ward Theory" of peacemaking (building on "just war theory" in academia). They point out the many Church structures, such as geographically defined

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15. My thanks to Elder Gerrit W. Gong for recently using the phrase "the natural self" as a gender-inclusive way to discuss "the natural man" in the twenty-first century. Gerrit W. Gong, "Trust Again," *Liahona* 45, no. 11 (November 2021): 98.

16. Patrick Mason and David Pulsipher, *Proclaim Peace: The Restoration's Answer to an Age of Conflict* (Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2021), 217.

congregations, ministering assignments, and missionary work, that persistently connect us to others outside our comfort zones.

Let's consider the 7.7 billion people on the earth today, all of whom are God's children, and value each person's "weight" on the eternal scales just as much as that of our own self. What does it mean to be  $\frac{1}{7,700,000,000}$  (to say nothing of the dead)? This demographic view helps us understand how little one person can actually know about "the human condition" and the right way to be in the world. For example, even if I were to master learning about the cultures and perspectives of everyone in my home country, the United States, I would end up knowing only about 6 percent of my sisters and brothers globally.

The odds are extremely low that our individual platform of assumptions, opinions, and values is 100 percent correct and that everyone else should align their worldviews and choices with ours. It is much more likely that our personal platforms have an idiosyncratic shape due to the particular economic, cultural, religious, and political situations into which we were born. People born in Senegal tend to be Muslims. People born in Alabama tend to be Republicans. In human history, because of China's large premodern and present-day population and influence on other populous civilizations, people having conversations about good government have tended to be East Asian Confucians, though other philosophers from places like India, Greece, and so on have also contributed much to humanity's moral understanding.

Here are some more "test questions" that might help us start seeing more of the 99.9999999 percent of the beloved children God currently sees:

1. What percentage of my trusting relationships and thoughtful conversations are with members of my same "kind of people"? How can I expand the circle of people with whom I have a two-way relationship?
2. Can I speak someone else's language? Can I cook someone else's favorite meal?
3. What do I know of the experiences of fellow Latter-day Saints outside my own country? (Check out the Global Histories in the Church History section of Gospel Library.)<sup>17</sup>

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17. "Global Histories," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed November 17, 2021, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/global-histories?lang=eng>.

4. Since statistically some of the planks in my “personal political platform” are bound to be wrong, or at least able to be drastically improved, where’s an area of policy where I can practice openness to others’ ideas and expertise?
5. Can I name five Latter-day Saint general leaders with a different gender, ethnicity, or nationality from mine? What have they taught recently?

A wide-angle view of our sisters and brothers in the present and in the past connects us with the wisdom of many inspired thinkers who have wrestled with the question of morality and good governance. Over and over, we see that those who wish to transform the world for good must begin with themselves.

Speaking to the Church amid the ravages of the Second World War in 1943, Latter-day Saint Apostle John A. Widtsoe put it this way: “Each individual . . . holds in his own hands the peace of the world. That makes me responsible for the peace of the world, and makes you individually responsible for the peace of the world. The responsibility cannot be shifted to someone else.”<sup>18</sup>

### What Lack I Yet?

Asking “What lack I yet?” like the rich young man in scripture (Matt. 19:20), yet being willing to obey the Savior’s answer, we must govern our natural selves, disciplining our tendency to uncharitable or untrustworthy interaction with the same strict boundaries we set regarding drunkenness or pornography. With the same systematic approach missionaries use to find people to teach, we must seek out fellow beings who are, to us, “the least” in our consciousness and understanding. President Bonnie H. Cordon recently called on us to “look *round about again*,” as Christ did, to discern how others feel and what they need.<sup>19</sup>

If we apply ourselves to cultivating the self, we will, in accordance with *The Great Learning* and through the Savior’s gift of repentance, develop new hearts and minds. We will be able to internalize the priorities of our Heavenly Father and Mother, who created all with the

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18. John A. Widstoe, in *One Hundred Fourteenth Semi-annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Chrsit of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Chrsit of Latter-day Saints, 1943), 113.

19. Bonnie H. Cordon, “Come to Christ and Don’t Come Alone,” *Liahona* 45, no. 11 (November 2021): 12, emphasis in original.

potential to become like them in sight and in power.<sup>20</sup> We will develop the capacity to shed forth the love of Christ in our families, neighborhoods, countries, and beyond, in joyful preparation for the day when the Lord will come again and all the world will be at peace.

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20. David L. Paulsen and Martin Pulido, “A Mother There”: A Survey of Historical Teachings about Mother in Heaven,” *BYU Studies* 50, no. 1 (2011): 71–97, discusses the longstanding Latter-day Saint theological tradition of belief in Mother in Heaven as a full deity and co-creator with the Father.