# "To Dress It and to Keep It"

## Toward a Mormon Theology of Work

*Walker A. Wright*

In the controversial film *Monty Python's Life of Brian,* the protagonist, Brian, finds himself in the market square while being pursued by Roman centurions. In the speakers' corner of the market, three different prophets are shown attempting to gain an audience with tales of Armageddon. One dust-covered wild man shrieks about "the beast . . . huge and black, and the eyes thereof red with the blood of living creatures, and the whore of Babylon shall ride forth on a three-headed serpent." Next to him, garbed in red, a more refined preacher boldly pronounces that "the demon shall bear a nine-bladed sword. . . . Not two or five or seven, but *nine,* which he will wield on all wretched sinners." Finally, a quiet, simple-looking man offers this less-than-extraordinary prophecy: "And there shall in that time be rumors of things going astray, and there will be a great confusion as to where things really are. . . . At this time a friend shall lose his friend's hammer and the young shall not know where lieth the things possessed by their fathers that their fathers put there only just the night before around 8 o'clock."[1]

These three prophetic characters are listed in the credits as (1) the Blood & Thunder Prophet, (2) the False Prophet, and (3) the Boring Prophet. Eschatology—the theology concerning the end times—maintains a privileged status in the scriptural canon and LDS thought. Yet when we read the apocalyptic fervor in the scriptures, we generally focus on the dramatics. We are captivated by the intense and sometimes

1. *Monty Python's Life of Brian,* directed by Terry Jones (Burbank, Calif.: Warner Brothers, 1979).

## Walker A. Wright

I first took an interest in economics and management practices as an undergraduate at the University of North Texas. I was intrigued by the behaviors of people within systems and the incentives that drove them. As I studied workplace motivation and other related topics, I began to realize how important this information was for improving the everyday lives of billions of people worldwide. However, the theological significance didn't shine through until I read David Foster Wallace's "This Is Water," in which he describes "a crowded, hot, slow, consumer-hell type situation as not only meaningful, but sacred, on fire with the same force that made the stars: love, fellowship, the mystical oneness of all things deep down."* This spiritual view of the mundane was intensified by my study of early Mormonism's cosmology and my introduction to the Hasidic concept of "worship through corporeality" by my friend Allen Hansen. Allen and I eventually coauthored a paper on these topics. This in turn led me to prepare a couple papers for the Faith and Knowledge conference and Mormon Scholars in the Humanities on the subject of Mormonism and work. These final two presentations became the basis for this article.

Religion scholars and business experts rarely interact or draw on each others' work. I hope that this article can act as a kind of bridge between the two. More important, I hope this article can help lay readers find meaning and purpose—the sacred—in their everyday work.

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* David Foster Wallace, "This Is Water," commencement address delivered at Kenyon College, May 21, 2005, p. 8, transcript available at http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~drkelly/DFWKenyonAddress2005.pdf.

gruesome images of future events; images that are parodied by the film's first two prophets above. However, what is often overlooked in these eschatological details is the very thing alluded to by the Boring Prophet: the continuation of the mundane portions of everyday life. As the lost hammer he mentions may imply, one major facet of the everyday is *work*. For example, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, employed parents in the U.S. between the ages of 25 and 54 spend about 54 percent of their waking hours working. When other unpaid work such as caring for others or household activities are included, the percentage rises to 68.[2] While work tends to mean "paid employment," the definition provided by theologian R. Paul Stevens is far more useful: "any purposeful expenditure of energy—whether manual, mental, or both, whether paid or not."[3] This article will take an interdisciplinary approach toward a Mormon theology of work. It will argue that Adam's earliest calling in "the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it" (Gen. 2:15 KJV) implies that work is part of man's original purpose. It will then examine a diverse amount of ancient prophecies and their use of Edenic imagery to describe the world to come, thus echoing and expanding Adam's first duty. This will be further supported by various eschatological descriptions in the scriptures that speak not only of a world of restoration, joy, and peace, but one of work as well. Mormon concepts of Zion and eternal progression will also be reviewed, establishing the sacred nature of work within Latter-day Saint theology. Finally, research from management and organizational sciences will be utilized to make evident the value of work in achieving human happiness and flourishing.

## Labor in the Garden of Eden

The necessity of work traces back to the depiction of Adam's prefallen state in the Garden of Eden. Based on a quick reading of the opening chapters of Genesis, it may appear that work is an unfortunate byproduct of the Fall: "Cursed be the soil for your sake, with pangs shall you eat from it all the days of your life. Thorn and thistle shall it sprout for you and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow shall

2. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "American Time Use Survey," http://www.bls.gov/tus/charts/.

3. R. Paul Stevens, *Work Matters: Lessons from Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2012), 2.

you eat bread till you return to the soil, for from there were you taken, for dust you are and to dust shall you return."[4]

However, a closer reading finds that initially "the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground" (Gen. 2:5 KJV). God responds to this need by "form[ing] man of the dust of the ground. . . . And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden *to dress it and to keep it*" (Gen. 2:7, 15 KJV; italics added). Commenting on these verses, Rabbi Avraham Shapira expounds, "Labor is understood in the Bible as man's destiny; there is a close connection between man (*adam*) and soil (*adamah*) that is rooted in man's (Adam's) having been created 'from the dust of the earth [*adamah*]'. . . and this connection is concretized, in the main, through labor. . . . The first task imposed upon man after he is created and placed in the garden of Eden is 'to work it [*le'ovdah*] and keep it [*leshomrah*].' . . . The talmudic sages see this as an expression of the great importance of labor."[5] LDS scholar David Bokovoy has argued that Genesis 2 depicts Adam as a "divine king" and gardener who, "through a type of *imitatio dei* would continue to perform the work of Yahweh who 'planted' the garden."[6] Agricultural imagery was employed by Mesopotamian kings who saw themselves as assuming "the same role filled by deities who created the universe by giving order to preexistent chaos. In its depiction of Adam as the primordial gardener, the Bible relies upon similar imagery."[7] Moreover, "the work of gardening was assigned to lesser members of the divine council" in Mesopotamian myths, indicating "that [the] biblical authors viewed humanity as an earthly extension of the divine council."[8] Labor, it seems, is an inherent quality of the divine life. While the lesser gods of Mesopotamian myth rebelled, Adam is instead provided with a coworker. Even the introduction of Eve is couched in terms of work; as a helper equal to the task of tending the garden (see Gen. 2:20–23).

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4. Genesis 3:17–19 as rendered in Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), liv.

5. Avraham Shapira, "Work," in *20th Century Jewish Religious Thought: Original Essays on Critical Concepts, Movements, and Beliefs,* ed. Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2009), 1055–56.

6. David E. Bokovoy, "'Ye Really *Are* Gods': A Response to Michael Heiser concerning the LDS Use of Psalm 82 and the Gospel of John," *FARMS Review* 19, no. 1 (2007): 290.

7. Bokovoy, "'Ye Really *Are* Gods,'" 291.

8. Bokovoy, "'Ye Really *Are* Gods,'" 294.

## The Eschatological Restoration of Eden

When the prophets of the Hebrew Bible spoke of Israel's final restoration, they relied heavily on the imagery of Eden.[9] This choice language solidifies the connection between ancient Israelite eschatology and Adam's primordial assignment. For example, after drawing on Israel's history of exile and the Torah's wilderness tradition, Jeremiah declares, "They shall come and shout on the heights of Zion, radiant over the bounty of the lord. . . . They shall fare like a *watered garden,* they shall never languish again" (Jer. 31:12 JPS;[10] italics added). With a likely allusion to the garden "planted . . . eastward in Eden" (Gen. 2:8 KJV), Amos prophesies of a time when God "will restore [his] people Israel. . . . And [he] will *plant* them upon their soil, nevermore to be uprooted from the soil [he has] given them—saith the lord your God" (Amos 9:14–15 JPS; italics added). The prophet Ezekiel foresees an age when "men shall say, 'That land, once desolate, has become like the *garden of Eden.*' . . . And the nations that are left around you shall know that I the lord have rebuilt the ravaged places and *replanted* the desolate land. I the lord have spoken and will act" (Ezek. 36:35–36 JPS; italics added). The prophetic writings in Isaiah are explicit in their use of Edenic imagery. In the book of Isaiah, Eden and Zion occupy "the same mythical space." While "Zion is not projected back to the beginning," it "is shown to be *like* Eden. . . . This transformed reality is described in terms of *quality* of space rather than geographical location."[11] Isaiah 51 reads, "Truly the lord has comforted Zion, comforted all her ruins; He has made her wilderness *like Eden*, her desert like the *Garden of the lord*. Gladness and joy shall abide there, thanksgiving and the sound of music" (Isa. 51:3 JPS; italics added; compare

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9. Their judgments and prophecies were also shaped by the Exodus narrative. See Isaiah 4:2–6; 11:11–14; 12:1; 19:19–25; 43:1–7, 14–21; 50:2–3; 51:1–52:15; Jeremiah 23:7–8; 31:31–34; 33:4–11; Ezekiel 20; 36:24–26, 33; Hosea 2:16–17; 11:1–11; Amos 9:7–15; Haggai 2:5–6; Zechariah 8:1–8; 10:10–12; Malachi 3:1. Similar patterns can be found in the Book of Mormon. See George S. Tate, "The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," in *Literature of Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experience,* ed. Neal E. Lambert (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1981); S. Kent Brown, "The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30, no. 3 (1990): 111–26.

10. Jewish Publication Society.

11. Joy Hooker, "Zion as Theological Symbol in Isaiah: Implications for Judah, for the Nations, and for Empire," in *Isaiah and Imperial Context: The Book of Isaiah in the Times of Empire,* ed. Andrew T. Abernethy and others (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 114–15.

2 Ne. 8:3). This trend continues within modern revelation. For example, the Doctrine and Covenants is peppered with the language of Isaiah, especially the latter chapters (40–66) and their message of redemption and restoration.[12] Joseph Smith is said to have described "the Millenial Glory" as the time in which "'the earth shall yield its increase, resume its paradisean glory and become as the garden of the Lord.'"[13] In his letter to John Wentworth, Smith puts forth the belief that "the earth will be renewed and receive its paradasaic glory."[14] An 1832 revelation tells of the need for the earth to "be sanctified, from all unrighteousness, that it may be prepared for the celestial glory."[15] In the biblical texts, this glorious renewal tends to be connected with the restoration of the temple as the center of creation, with Eden being the prototype sanctuary.[16] Just as "a river went out of Eden to water the garden" (Gen. 2:10 KJV) and all of creation, multiple prophets foresaw a time when "a spring shall issue from the House of the Lord" (Joel 4:18 JPS; compare Ezek. 47:1–12; Zech. 14:8) and heal the barren land. John of Patmos drew on Ezekiel's vision when he wrote of "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding

12. See Terry B. Ball and Spencer S. Snyder, "Isaiah in the Doctrine and Covenants," in *You Shall Have My Word: Exploring the Text of the Doctrine and Covenants,* ed. Scott C. Esplin, Richard O. Cowan, and Rachel Cope (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2012).

13. "History, 1838–1856, Volume C-1 Addenda," 32, on Church Historian's Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers,* http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-addenda &p=32.

14. Joseph Smith, "Church History," *Times and Seasons* 3 (March 1, 1842): 710, available online at Church Historian's Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers,* http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/church-history-1-march-1842&p=5.

15. Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Revelations and Translations, Volume 1: Manuscript Revelation Books,* vol. 1 of the Revelations and Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers,* ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2011), 360; available online as "Revelation, December 27–28, 1832 [D&C 88:1–126]," 35, on Church Historian's Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers,* http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/revelation-27-28-december-1832-dc-881-126&p=3.

16. See Donald W. Parry, "Garden of Eden: Prototype Sanctuary," in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism,* ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1994); Gordon J. Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story," in *"I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood": Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11,* ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994).

out of the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev. 22:1 KJV; compare Ezek. 47). Drawing on this imagery, theologian Rob Dalrymple describes Eden as "an expanding, earth-filling sanctuary."[17] "That the prophets allude to the restoration of the temple in terms of Eden raises the question as to whether or not Eden was itself intended to fill the Earth. For, if the final restoration of the temple is depicted in terms of the Garden of Eden, and if the New Jerusalem is ultimately that earth-encompassing temple, then one might suspect that *Eden was, at least conceptually, intended to expand and fill the earth.*"[18]

In this future paradise, the whole of creation is renewed and redeemed. It is noteworthy that the Hebrew *ʿavad* ("dress") and *shamar* ("keep") in Genesis 2:15 are used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, largely in connection with religious or cultic functions.[19] Adam's gardening duties were thus priestly in nature,[20] indicating that consecrated labors can take on spiritual significance and break down the walls between the secular and the sacred. This combination is similar to the Mormon expectation "that the earth will not be destroyed but glorified, not transcended but transformed, and that ultimately the polarization of earth and heaven will be overcome."[21] The overlap of the sacred and the mundane manifests itself in the belief systems of both ancient Israel and early Mormonism.

## Labor in Ancient Israelite Eschatology

The Israelite eschatological hope was for the epoch in which God's covenant people could get on with their everyday lives (including work) without the hindrances of injustice, disease, war, and even death. This

17. Rob Dalrymple, *Understanding Eschatology: Why It Matters* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 65.

18. Dalrymple, *Understanding Eschatology*, 64; italics added.

19. For example, see Exodus 3:12; Numbers 3:7–8; 7:5, 9; 8:22; 16:9; 18:4, 6, 21, 23, 31; 1 Chronicles 9:13; 23:28, 32; 28:13. See Donald W. Parry, "Service and Temple in King Benjamin's Speech," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 16, no. 2 (2007): 45–46.

20. See Robert Hinckley, "Adam, Aaron, and the Garden Sanctuary," *Logia: A Journal of Lutheran Theology* 22, no. 4 (2013): 6–9; John H. Walton, "Proposition 12: Adam Is Assigned as Priest in Sacred Space, with Eve to Help," in *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

21. Thomas J. Riskas Jr., "New Heaven and New Earth," in *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism,* ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:1009.

view has its foundation in the theology of ancient Israel, which "was intensely grounded in time and space."[22] It was a theology based on the nation's history, focusing on Israel's covenants of the past and the long-awaited promises regarding its future. Consequently, its eschatology followed suit. "This is no escapist eschatology," writes one Old Testament scholar, "since it never completely forsakes the world we now inhabit. Rather it longs for, indeed expects, a period in which Yhwh triumphs over evil, redeems his people Israel, and finally rules the world in peace and salvation."[23] As renowned Anglican scholar N. T. Wright has noted, "There is very little in the Bible about 'going to heaven when you die' and not a lot about postmortem hell either,"[24] especially in the Hebrew Bible. The prophet Isaiah (as well as Micah and Nephi) spoke of this future period of peace and salvation in which "the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. . . . For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa. 2:2–4 KJV; compare Micah 4:1–3; 2 Ne. 12:2–4). *The Jewish Study Bible* elaborates, "The prophet does not imagine a future without borders or distinct nationalities. International conflicts will still occur, but nations will no longer resolve them through warfare. Instead, nations will submit to arbitration at Mount Zion."[25] But submission to divine law is not the only element of this newfound peace. New Testament scholar Ben Witherington makes the following observation:

> When Isaiah envisions the eschatological age, or the last days, he does not envision a massive work stoppage. What he envisions is a massive war stoppage, if we may put it that way. The point of beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks is so that the weapons

22. Bill T. Arnold, "Old Testament Eschatology and the Rise of Apocalypticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology,* ed. Jerry L. Walls (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 23.

23. Arnold, "Old Testament Eschatology," 25.

24. N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 18.

25. "Isaiah," in *The Jewish Study Bible: Tanakh Translation,* ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 788.

> of war may be turned into the tools of work. When Isaiah envisages the final or eschatological state of affairs, his vision of shalom, well-being, peace, is not of a workless paradise, but of a world at peace worshiping the one true God and working together rather than warring with each other.[26]

As cited by Witherington above, the continuation of labor is critical to Isaiah's eschatology and for the achievement of *shalom.* The Hebrew word *shalom* "is derived from a root denoting wholeness or completeness, and its frame of reference throughout Jewish literature is bound up with the notion of *shelemut,* perfection." It refers "to a *state of affairs,* one of well-being, tranquility, prosperity, and security."[27] It has been described as "the webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight. . . . In the Bible, shalom means *universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight*—a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed. . . . Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be."[28] The continued presence of labor and fruitful employment is coupled with God's new age of *shalom* in the eschatological hopes of the ancients: "I will bring back my people, Israel," cries Amos; "they will *rebuild* the cities lying in rubble and settle down. They will *plant* vineyards and drink the wine they produce; they will *grow* orchards and eat the fruit they produce" (Amos 9:14 NET; italics added). "Thus says the Lord God," declares Ezekiel, "on the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the towns to be inhabited, and the waste places shall be *rebuilt.* The land that was desolate shall be *tilled,* instead of being the desolation that it was in the sight of all who passed by" (Ezek. 36:33–34 NRSV; italics added). In Isaiah, "the satisfaction of building will not be accompanied by the fear of destruction or conquest"[29] that has plagued Israel's experience: "They shall *build* houses and inhabit them; they shall *plant* vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not *build* and another inhabit; they shall not *plant* and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people

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26. Ben Witherington III, *Work: A Kingdom Perspective on Labor* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2011), xiii–xiv.

27. Aviezer Ravitzky, "Peace," in *20th Century Jewish Religious Thought,* 685.

28. Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 10.

29. John N. Oswart, *The NIV Application Commentary: Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003), 688.

be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the *works of their hands.* They shall not *labor in vain*" (Isa. 65:21–23 RSV; italics added). These passages imply that meaningful work not only maintains a continual place in God's new world but is possibly even necessary to the integrity of *shalom.*

**Eternal Progression and Mormon Metaphysics**

The establishment of peace through the continuation of work in an Edenic or celestial state fits comfortably within the LDS concept of eternal progression. As Mormon philosopher Jacob Baker explains:

> [Many] Mormon thinkers and writers viewed eternal progression in terms which, for them, instilled unique meaning and purpose into this life and the post-mortal eternities. A quest to infuse human existence with special significance and value underlay sweeping notions of unlocking the eternal laws of the universe and becoming gods. . . . At the heart of early expositions on eternal progression is the concept that eternal, godlike *activity* is what provides meaning and purpose to any and every stage of human existence. . . . For these Mormons, the only happy heaven is the one in which activity is eternalized, a heaven where the acquisition of new knowledge leads to higher and higher realms of meaningful existence.[30]

An inkling of this exalted view of activity can be found within the first few years of the Church's establishment. An often overlooked element of Mormon history is the fact that the earliest enactment of what we call the law of consecration was a business institution known as the United Firm. Writes historian Max Parkin:

> While Latter-day Saints may not typically think of Joseph Smith as an energetic businessman or an assertive entrepreneur, multiple business interests captured his attention beginning shortly after the Church was organized. By February 1831 in Kirtland, Ohio, he began to inquire about economic matters, and by July, the twenty-five-year-old Joseph Smith embarked on a path of land acquisition, community planning, and other commercial ventures. He operated his businesses under the principles of consecration and stewardship and coordinated his enterprises through a business management company he named the United

30. Jacob T. Baker, "'The Grandest Principle of the Gospel': Christian Nihilism, Sanctified Activism, and Eternal Progression," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 41, no. 3 (2008): 56–57.

> Firm. He supervised the firm by revelation, including a final lengthy revelation in April 1834 that terminated the company.[31]

This dynamic enterprise was established to generate funds and incorporate the temporal affairs of the Church. These affairs included a mercantile branch, a publishing enterprise, farms, a brickyard, a stone quarry, an ashery, a sawmill, and real estate. Prior to the development of quorums and high councils, the United Firm was headed by a board of—not priests or apostles—but *managers*. It is striking to see business—a commercial activity often held in suspicion—elevated to the very embodiment of Zion. In other words, the Kingdom of God was to be built here on earth by means of business management and entrepreneurship. Though the firm was eventually terminated and its assets redistributed among its officers, this sacralizing of the mundane—what Terryl Givens refers to as "the collapse of sacred distance"[32]—continued to play a major role in Mormon theology and metaphysics. If Smith planted the seeds for a more tangible divinity, then the doctrine's ultimate fruition came under the leadership of Brigham Young.

President Young saw the "work of building up Zion" as "a practical work" and "not a mere theory."[33] The Saints were "not going to wait for angels, or for Enoch and his company to come and build up Zion, but we are going to build it."[34] He preached that if the Saints were to "ever walk in streets paved with gold," they would have to mine and lay the gold themselves, just as the "angels that now walk in their golden streets" did. "When we enjoy a Zion in its beauty and glory," he said, "it will be when we have built it."[35] Essentially, part of the joy of Zion is the work that goes into it. Echoing D&C 29:34, Young taught, "In the mind of God there is no such a thing as dividing spiritual from temporal, or temporal from spiritual; for they are one in the Lord."[36] Sacred tasks could range from "preaching, praying, laboring with my hands

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31. Max H Parkin, "Joseph Smith and the United Firm: The Growth and Decline of the Church's First Master Plan of Business and Finance, Ohio and Missouri, 1832–1834," *BYU Studies* 46, no. 3 (2007): 5–6.

32. Terryl L. Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 83.

33. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 9:284 (February 23, 1862).

34. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 9:284 (February 23, 1862).

35. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 8:354–55 (March 3, 1861).

36. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 11:18 (December 11, 1864).

for an honorable support; whether I am in the field, mechanic's shop, or following mercantile business, or wherever duty calls, I am serving God as much in one place as another; and so it is with all, each in his place, turn and time."[37]

Borrowing from religious anthropologist Douglas Davies, Baker notes that being "active" is "a key Mormon value" that is "institutionalized and ritualized at nearly every level of the Church":

> This view of sanctified activism collapsed the chasm between the godly and earthly realms of activity and allowed Mormons to religiously ground all their activity in this process of deification. . . . Mormons found meaning and joy through the extravagant proposition that eternal activity could and would result in deification. Consequently, the purpose of all activity in mortality and postmortality is not happiness per se or even preparation for eternal rest within the family circle. Instead, its purpose is centered on training and instruction for becoming gods.[38]

The doctrine of eternal progression later meshed comfortably with the optimism of early twentieth-century progressivism. "Joseph Smith's vision of human potential and Brigham Young's fusion of faith and community building wove nicely into Progressivism's confidence in human effort. Even its conviction that organization, rationalization, and commitment to moral virtue could accomplish breathtakingly utopian goals echoed the old dream of a Zion society."[39] The imbrication of heaven and earth became more literal and was rationalized with scientific concepts by Mormon academics and leaders such as John Widtsoe and James Talmage. For Widtsoe in particular (as well as B. H. Roberts), the "joy" spoken of in 2 Nephi 2:25 ("Adam fell that men might be; and men are that they might have joy") is connected to progress: "One who is active, increasing, progressing, who accepts and obeys the gospel law, ever moves into higher zones of existence, and carries others along in his onward course. He receives the gift of eternal life, with its unending conquest, progress, development, and growth. He feels the quivering, thrilling response called joy."[40]

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37. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 13:260 (October 6, 1870).

38. Baker, "'Grandest Principle of the Gospel,'" 66–69.

39. Matthew Bowman, *The Mormon People: The Making of an American Faith* (New York: Random House, 2012), 153–54.

40. John A. Widtsoe, *Understandable Religion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1944), 37–38, quoted in Baker, "'Grandest Principle of the Gospel,'" 70.

For Widtsoe and Roberts, the divine life became associated not only with eternal kinship,[41] but also with the individual potential for never-ending progress and activity, something they increasingly emphasized. Ultimately, as Baker points out, "an infinitely transcendent and eternally self-surpassing existence of adventure and new discovery was the essence of a celestial existence."[42]

## The Importance of Work

But why work? How could something so often described as drudgery be associated with joy and seen as a vital component of the world to come? Finding meaning in the lone and dreary world of day-to-day work has become a point of increasing interest among management experts and organizational theorists, and their models yield fruitful insights into this area of Mormonism. In their book *Wellbeing,* Gallup researchers Tom Rath and Jim Harter point to evidence that shows, given a few years, people recover from tragic events (like the death of a spouse) to the same level of well-being prior to the tragedy. "But this was not the case for those who were unemployed for a prolonged period of time—particularly not for men. *Our wellbeing actually recovers more rapidly from the death of a spouse than it does from a sustained period of unemployment.*"[43] Based on data from the General Social Survey, economist Arthur Brooks also found that one of the key elements for achieving happiness and self-fulfillment is work.[44] This is due to its connection to what Brooks calls "earned success": the ability to create value in our lives and in the lives of others.[45]

This value creation takes on numerous forms and is experienced in different stages. For example, one major aspect from psychological research that has been applied to work is the concept of *flow*: a state

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41. For an excellent treatment of this subject, see Samuel M. Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

42. Baker, "'Grandest Principle of the Gospel,'" 71.

43. Tom Rath and Jim Harter, *Wellbeing: The Five Essential Elements* (New York: Gallup Press, 2010), 17; italics in original.

44. Arthur C. Brooks, "Happiness Is a Full-Time Job," ch. 7 in *Gross National Happiness: Why Happiness Matters for America—and How We Can Get More of It* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 153–74.

45. See Arthur C. Brooks, "America and the Value of 'Earned Success,'" *Wall Street Journal,* May 8, 2012, A13; Arthur C. Brooks, "A Formula for Happiness," *New York Times,* December 14, 2013, SR1.

of heightened focus and immersion in the task at hand. According to psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Flow makes us feel better in the moment, enabling us to experience the remarkable potential of the body and mind fully functioning in harmony. But what makes flow an even more significant tool is its ability to improve the quality of life in the long run. . . . A good flow activity is one that offers a very high ceiling of opportunities for improvement. . . . If one wants to stay in flow, he or she must progress and learn more skills, rising to new levels of complexity."[46] Csikszentmihalyi sees the experience of flow as the continuous building of psychological capital. This is intertwined with what business author Daniel Pink identifies as "mastery," which "is a mindset [that] requires the capacity to see your abilities . . . as infinitely improvable."[47] Mastery is an asymptote and can never be fully realized, an ingredient that makes it both frustrating and alluring. Pink explains, "Flow is essential to mastery. But flow doesn't guarantee mastery—because the two concepts operate on different horizons of time. One happens in a moment; the other unfolds over months, years, sometimes decades. You and I each might reach flow tomorrow morning—but neither one of us will achieve mastery overnight."[48] Just as "flow" and "mastery" are not synonymous, "work engagement" also has a distinct definition characterized by high activity and stimulation (vigor), significant and meaningful pursuit (dedication), and long-term engrossment (absorption).[49] This connotes a sense of enthusiasm that contrasts with the contentment and serenity of mere job satisfaction. The possible benefits of work engagement include higher job performance, organizational commitment, and better health and well-being.[50]

Furthermore, this accumulation of skills and ongoing betterment squares positively with the research of Harvard's Teresa Amabile and psychologist Steven Kramer. After analyzing nearly twelve thousand

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46. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Good Business: Leadership, Flow, and the Making of Meaning* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 63.

47. Daniel H. Pink, *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2009), 222–23.

48. Pink, *Drive,* 118.

49. See Arnold B. Bakker, "An Evidence-Based Model of Work Engagement," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 20, no. 4 (2011): 265–69.

50. See Arnold B. Bakker and Wilmar B. Schaufeli, "Work Engagement," in *Wiley Encyclopedia of Management,* vol. 11: *Organizational Behavior,* ed. Patrick C. Flood and Yseult Freeney (West Sussex, UK: Wiley, 2014).

daily "event" diaries from over two hundred knowledge workers, they discovered that the single most important factor that positively boosts workers' "inner work life" (the convergence of emotions, perceptions, and motivations individuals experience as they react to and make sense of their workday) is "*making progress in meaningful work.*"[51] Recognizing even incremental progress can increase engagement and happiness at work. Major breakthroughs are rare events, but "small wins" occur far more often and provide tangible evidence of improvement.[52] This measurable progress satisfies a deep human need: "One of the most basic human drives is toward *self-efficacy*—a person's belief that he or she is individually capable of planning and executing the tasks required to achieve desired goals. . . . The strong need for self-efficacy explains why everyday work progress stands out as the key event stimulating positive inner work life."[53] According to Amabile and Kramer, "Real progress triggers positive emotions like satisfaction, gladness, even joy. It leads to a sense of accomplishment and self-worth as well as positive views of the work and, sometimes, the organization."[54] Modern research finds that these "positive emotions generate 'upward spirals' toward optimal functioning and enhanced emotional well-being."[55] Positive emotions are contagious and "propagate within organizations . . . because positive emotions stem from—and create—meaningful interpersonal encounters. . . . Accordingly, the broaden-and-build theory predicts that positive emotions in organizational settings not only produce individuals who function at higher levels, but may also produce organizations that function at higher levels."[56] In short, "efforts to cultivate positive emotions" within an organization (for example, the Church) or community (for example, Zion) through interpersonal relationships may lead to

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51. Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer, *The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2011), 73–74; italics in original.

52. See Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer, "The Power of Small Wins," *Harvard Business Review* 89 (May 2011): 70–80.

53. Amabile and Kramer, *Progress Principle,* 90.

54. Amabile and Kramer, *Progress Principle,* 68.

55. Barbara L. Fredrickson, "Positive Emotions and Upward Spirals in Organizations," in *Positive Organizational Scholarship: Foundations of a New Discipline,* ed. Kim S. Cameron, Jane E. Dutton, and Robert E. Quinn (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2003), 169.

56. Fredrickson, "Positive Emotions and Upward Spirals," 174.

"harmony, energy, and perhaps even prosperity."[57] Or, in other words, these efforts may lead to what the scriptures call being "of one heart and one mind" (Moses 7:18). When one reviews Widtsoe's interpretation of "joy" above, it appears to be a theological version of these findings, an elemental part of our nature that will be enlarged and expanded throughout the eternities in order for the human race to experience a "fulness of joy" (D&C 93:33–34).[58]

## Conclusion

Pope John Paul II once described work as "a fundamental dimension of man's existence on earth."[59] As this article has shown, the pope's claim can be supported by God's original instruction to Adam to dress and keep the Garden of Eden. The prophetic use of Edenic imagery throughout the Hebrew Bible suggests that the Adamic call to work was meant to extend into the eschaton. According to the scriptural accounts of various eschatological visions, labor will continue to thrive in and possibly even contribute to God's age of *shalom*. The spiritual significance of work is bolstered further by Mormonism's metaphysical collapse of the sacred and the mundane and its doctrine of eternal progression. In the views of Mormon leaders like John Widtsoe, the chance to learn and progress in new and emboldening activities must be eternal for eternity to be meaningful. Flow, mastery, engagement, and progression—along with the positive psychology underlying them—are important for increasing our understanding of the nature of human fulfillment and flourishing.

As the field of Mormon studies continues to grow, research from management and organizational theory can shed light on both the Church's current institution and its ideal goal of Zion. More important, it can provide insightful models for a Mormon theology of work and eternal progression. This topic will be of interest to academics and lay

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57. Fredrickson, "Positive Emotions and Upward Spirals," 175.

58. Notice that "fulness" in these verses requires the merging of spirit and element, heaven and earth.

59. John Paul II, *Encyclical Laborem Exercens: To His Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, to the Priests, to the Religious Families, to the Sons and Daughters of the Church, and to All Men and Women of Good Will on Human Work on the Ninetieth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum* (1981), available online at http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html.

persons alike, seeing that both are prone to spend the majority of their waking hours performing some form of work. In short, this paper can be seen as laying the groundwork for a renewed outlook on work, one that infuses labor with a heightened sense of spiritual purpose. This new lens will aid in the development of a more realistic expectation of the age to come, human progression, and eventual divinization.

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