

# The Big Picture

*20 Family-Friendly Lessons  
on God's Plan for You*

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Other Books by John Hilton III and Anthony Sweat

*Why? Powerful Answers and Practical Reasons  
for Living LDS Standards*

*How? Essential Skills for Living the Gospel*

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## Preface

This book can be used in two ways.

First, this is a book written for teenagers to sit down and read. If you're a teenager reading this book, great! You are who we are writing to! We hope this book provides you with additional knowledge and insights about God's plan so that you can go forward and use those truths to guide your everyday life. We promise you that you will be blessed as you follow "the great plan of happiness" (Alma 42:8).

Second, this is also a book that parents and teachers can use as a resource when teaching the gospel. Because this book is written to teenagers, perhaps the best thing you can do is to hand it to your child and ask him or her to plan the lesson! As you go through each chapter, you'll periodically find three different kinds of icons.



The Teach the Plan icon that includes a number on it. We refer back to these icons at the end of each chapter where we have provided a lesson outline to help you teach the material in family settings, church, or mutual.



In every chapter, you'll also see the Experiment upon the Word icon. It identifies a hands-on activity that you can do to help you "experiment upon [the word]" (Alma 32:27) and learn more about God's plan for you.

## PREFACE



Each chapter also includes a Live the Plan icon that invites you to act on the truths of the plan you are learning.

We know that true doctrine, understood, has the power to change attitudes and behavior. Our sincere desire is that this book can assist you in teaching youth to understand the vital doctrines that are a part of the plan of salvation.

## God's Greatest Gift: The Atonement of Jesus Christ



Have you ever wondered why the hymn “I Need Thee Every Hour”<sup>1</sup> says that we need Jesus every *hour*? Sometimes people think, “Well, I need Jesus when I sin and need to be forgiven, and I’ll need Jesus when I’m resurrected. But I don’t sin or need to be resurrected every *hour*. So why do I need him every hour of my life?” Hopefully, this chapter will help us all see that we don’t need Jesus every hour, we need him every *second!*

Consider the following real-life situations:

*Young woman #1:* “I don’t commit any serious sins, and I think I’m a good person. I know the Atonement applies to people who have sinned and need forgiveness, and because I’m pretty good it seems like I don’t need it as much as others. I know that sounds bad. I know I’m not perfect, but it seems like I don’t appreciate the Atonement like I should.”

*Young man #1:* “My father left when I was five and even though I’m only fifteen I have to work to pay the bills. I get so tired after going to school, and then working until midnight every night. I see other kids at school and they don’t have the problems I do. My mom tries to understand me but I don’t want to burden her with all my problems—she has enough of her own. I feel so alone. What can I do?”

*Young woman #2:* “My life has been really hard. I was diagnosed with cancer last year and the treatments I’ve been getting

are really painful. Sometimes I want to give up. What can I do to have the strength to keep going?"

*Young man #2*: "I have messed up my life. I've done everything bad that you can do. I feel like I have no hope, and no point in going on. It is too late for me."

Although each of these four teenagers struggle with different problems, the answer to their concerns lies in understanding the Atonement of Jesus Christ and applying what it can do for us in our everyday lives.

### What Is the Atonement of Jesus Christ?



To *atone* means to make something right, or to reconcile it. The primary purpose and meaning of the Atonement is to make us right before God, or to "be reconciled unto [God] through the atonement of Christ" (Jacob 4:11). In essence we are separated from God by both death and sin. When Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit, both physical death (mortality) and spiritual death (sin) entered the world. *True to the Faith* teaches that "as descendants of Adam and Eve, all people inherit the effects of the Fall. We all experience spiritual death, being separated from the presence of God, and we are all subject to temporal death, which is the death of the physical body."<sup>2</sup>

If we are to live with or become like God, we need to be both sinless and immortal like He is. The problem is that you and I cannot cleanse ourselves from sin, and we can't resurrect ourselves. We need someone else to do that for us. We need someone else to reconcile us. That is where the Atonement of Jesus Christ comes in. Only He could do it, because He was sinless and perfect.

Jesus was also the only one who could overcome death. Jesus inherited the mortal power to die from His mother Mary, and He inherited the power to resurrect and overcome death from His Heavenly Father. Jesus was uniquely qualified to help all of

us overcome sin and death, and because He loves us and loves the Father, Jesus voluntarily suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane beyond what we can imagine as He paid the price to justice for our sins. The suffering was so great that Jesus said it caused Him “to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit” (Doctrine and Covenants 19:18). Afterward, Jesus voluntarily submitted himself to the Roman soldiers and “was crucified, died, and rose again the third day” (Doctrine and Covenants 20:23), thus shattering the bands of death for all of God’s children and providing the power of resurrection.

We love Jesus for doing this! Without Him and His loving Atonement, “all mankind were in a lost and in a fallen state, and ever would be” (1 Nephi 10:6). But because of Him, we can overcome sin and death, and fulfill our potential as children of God to become like God and live with Him again. Without Jesus, the purpose of the plan of salvation fails (see Moses 1:39).

### **What Would Have Happened to Us If There Had Been No Atonement?**



What was the most important thing you did last week? How about last year? What is the most important thing you have done in your life? What do you think is the most important event that has ever happened in the history of the world?

Alma says that there is one event “of more importance than . . . all” (Alma 7:7) and that is the Atonement of Jesus Christ (see Alma 7:7–13). Why? Because without the Atonement, the whole plan of salvation wouldn’t work. We would have forever remained dead and in our sins, and “our spirits must become subject to . . . the devil, to rise no more. And our spirits must have become like unto him, and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself” (2 Nephi 9:8–9).

Thankfully, the greatest event in the history of the world happened—the Atonement of Christ—and we can be blessed by it every day.

## What Does the Atonement Mean for Me?

No matter who we are, the Atonement applies to us on a daily basis. President Boyd K. Packer taught, “For some reason, we think the Atonement of Christ applies *only* at the end of mortal life. . . . It is much more than that. It is an ever-present power to call upon in everyday life. When we are . . . burdened with grief, He can heal us. . . . *The Atonement has practical, personal everyday value.*”<sup>3</sup>



Let’s look at how four aspects of the Atonement can help each of us daily:

1. The cleansing power of the Atonement.
2. The understanding power of the Atonement.
3. The strengthening power of the Atonement.
4. The converting power of the Atonement.

### *The Cleansing Power of the Atonement*

Perhaps when we think of the Atonement we most often think of the power of Jesus Christ to cleanse us from sin. This is indeed a vital aspect of the Savior’s sacrifice.

Alma testified, “The Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance” (Alma 7:13). Amulek further witnessed, “I do know that Christ shall come among the children of men, to take upon him the transgressions of his people, and that he shall atone for the sins of the world; for the Lord God hath spoken it” (Alma 34:8).

The first young woman described at the beginning of this chapter might not realize it, but she needs the Atonement just as much as a drug addict does. Let’s use an analogy with clothing to help

us see this. If we liken sin to dirt, we could imagine that the drug dealer's clothes are covered in mud. The young woman who is doing her best to keep the commandments might have only a few stains on her shirt. But neither one will be able to go to heaven, for as the Savior has said, "I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance" (Doctrine and Covenants 1:31).

People who believe they don't need the cleansing power of the Atonement need to realize that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). This is not meant to drag us down or make anyone feel hopeless; rather, it is to remind us that we need to be humble and realize that even the "best" people need the cleansing power of the Atonement in their lives.

Similarly, there are some people (like the second young man from the beginning of the chapter) who think that they have sinned so much that it is impossible for them to ever be cleansed and made pure. They think that their sins are too serious, their mistakes too severe, their stains too dark and deep. We testify that the power of the Atonement is infinite (see 2 Nephi 9:7)—it can clean infinitely small sins, and infinitely large ones. If we haven't committed the unforgivable sin—which the average member cannot—then there is no sin the Atonement cannot cover. There is no hole Jesus cannot mend. There is no stain He cannot cleanse. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18).

Remember, even great prophets like Alma the Younger and the sons of Mosiah were once "the very vilest of sinners" (Mosiah 28:4), and the Lord forgave, changed, and redeemed them. If we come unto Christ in faith each day, and repent, He can redeem us too, no matter how serious the sin.

Whether we have big sins to battle, or little sins to overcome, we all need to repent daily. President Henry B. Eyring said, "One of the questions we must ask of our Heavenly Father in private prayer is this:

‘What have I done today, or not done, which displeases Thee? If I can only know, I will repent with all my heart without delay.’ That humble prayer will be answered.”<sup>4</sup> As we follow President Eyring’s advice, we will understand what we should stop or start doing. As we follow these impressions, repent, and make daily changes for the better, we will feel the cleansing power of the Atonement in our lives.



Elder D. Todd Christofferson shared the following story, which shows how even things we think are small, are still important.

In my youth I once was negligent in a way that later caused an injury to one of my brothers. It was not major, but required some stitches in his hand. I was embarrassed about it, and did not own up to my stupidity at the time, and no one ever knew about my role in the matter. Many years later, I was praying that God would reveal to me anything in my life that needed correction so that I might be found more acceptable before Him, and this incident came to my mind. Frankly, I had forgotten all about it. The Spirit whispered to me that this was an unresolved transgression that I needed to confess. I called my brother and apologized and asked for his forgiveness which he promptly and generously gave. . . .

It was interesting and very significant to me that the Lord had not forgotten about that event of the distant past even though I had. It was a comparatively small thing, but it still needed to be handled, or I would be answering for it at the judgment bar when the opportunity for repentance had passed. I realized once again that things do not get “swept under the rug” in the eternal economy of things. Sins do not take care of themselves or simply fade away. They must be dealt with, and the wonderful thing is that because of His atoning grace they can be dealt with in a much happier and less painful manner than directly satisfying offended justice ourselves.<sup>5</sup>

### *The Understanding Power of the Atonement*

Another way we can feel the power of the Atonement in our lives comes when we realize that Jesus understands everything about our lives because He has experienced it. He knows what we are going through because *He went through it*. Alma said that the Savior would “go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people” (Alma 7:11; emphasis added). Similarly Isaiah wrote that Christ “hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (Isaiah 53:4). If we feel like nobody can understand our situation, we are wrong. Christ does. And as we turn to Him in times of trial, we can feel of His love and understanding and apply this aspect of the Atonement in our lives.



Consider how Anne was able to feel the effects of the Atonement in her life and how it helped her overcome a difficult trial she faced.

I was eight years old when my parents divorced. I remember the day my dad moved out. It seemed like everything I knew about life fell to pieces after that. I was confused, lonely, and sad. It felt like a big part of me had been ripped out. . . .

As I got older, the hole inside me became a deep pit of sadness. I tried to fill it with all sorts of things: relationships, school, rebellion, even too much food. None of those things worked. . . .

. . . I had nowhere left to turn except to Christ. Night after night I knelt in prayer and asked my Heavenly Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, to heal my emptiness. . . .

. . . Little by little Heavenly Father intervened in my life to show me that Christ’s love *was* healing me. Heavenly Father also let me know He loves me, He knows me, and He wants me to have an eternal family.

I know, unmistakably now, that my Savior was aware of my pain and sadness. He never gave up on me. I can see now that He

strengthened me and carried me through those difficult times. . . .  
It was Christ who healed my heart.<sup>6</sup>

Whatever problems, whatever hardships, whatever frustrations, or whatever sadness we have had, the Savior has experienced it as well. Why did the Savior do all this? Alma taught that Christ did this so “that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:12). Bishop Merrill J. Bateman said, “In the garden and on the cross, Jesus saw each of us and not only bore our sins, but also experienced our deepest feelings so that he would know how to comfort and strengthen us.”<sup>7</sup>

### *The Strengthening Power of the Atonement*



Some people may not realize that there is power in the Atonement not only to help us overcome sin but also to strengthen us to do good, righteous things that we could not otherwise accomplish with our own capabilities. Elder David A. Bednar said, “Most of us clearly understand that the Atonement is for sinners. I am not so sure, however, that we know and understand that the Atonement is also for saints—for good men and women who are obedient and worthy and conscientious and who are striving to become better and serve more faithfully.”<sup>8</sup>

The Bible Dictionary uses the word “grace” to explain that through the Atonement of Christ we can be given “divine means of help or strength . . . an enabling power.”<sup>9</sup> The enabling power of the Atonement gives us ability beyond our natural capacity to do things we otherwise couldn’t accomplish on our own. It was the enabling power of the Atonement that gave Nephi the ability to build the boat, that allowed Peter to walk on water, that gave Joseph Smith the ability to translate the Book of Mormon. That same strengthening power from the Atonement can be given to us in our daily lives to make us better in all that we do.

Suppose for example that you are trying to overcome a bad temper. You can use lots of great techniques like breathing deeply or counting to ten. And you can also pray and ask for the power of the Atonement to give you strength to control your emotions and to change your nature to be more patient. When you have a church calling to perform, or even a homework assignment to do, you can pray for the strength of the Lord to help you accomplish it.

In Alma 31, Alma and his fellow missionaries faced a difficult challenge, but they knew the Savior could strengthen them. Alma prayed, saying, “O Lord, wilt thou grant unto me that I may have strength” (Alma 31:31). Alma didn’t pray for his trials to go away, he prayed for *strength*. The result of this prayer was that “the Lord . . . gave them strength” (Alma 31:38). The Lord not only gives prophets strength, but *True to the Faith* teaches us to “remember the strength you can receive through the enabling power of grace.”<sup>10</sup> The Atonement can give *us* strength in our daily lives as well.

### *The Converting Power of the Atonement*



The Atonement of Jesus Christ has the power to change our character. President Gordon B. Hinckley said the gospel—which is centered on the Atonement of Jesus Christ—“can change our very natures.”<sup>11</sup> Jesus’ Atonement can make bad people good, good people great, and great people into true saints. One of the purposes of this life is to gain Christlike attributes and become more like God, and a person can change “the natural man and [become] a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord” (Mosiah 3:19). Each day as we seek for Christ’s atoning assistance, He can transform us, change us, and make us holy, until “we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2). (See chapter 10.)

We testify that the Atonement of Jesus Christ is not only for serious sinners. It is not only for those who have died. It is not just

for the young, or the old. It is not something that is only needed occasionally, or even every hour. As we come to more fully understand and rely on the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we begin to realize how it blesses our life in every aspect, and how we need Jesus every minute of every day.



Grab a handful of rocks from the yard (at least twenty) and place them in a bag. With your eyes closed, put your hand into the bag and pick one of the rocks. Now, *without looking* at the rock you have chosen, pull it out of the bag and *feel* it. Take a minute and just feel the rock—get to know its shape, texture, and nooks and crannies. Now, with your eyes still closed, put it back with the other rocks and shake the bag. Then, dump out the rocks and find your rock.

Did you find it? Odds are you did. How? What was probably the first thing you did? You picked up the rock and *felt it* so you could be sure that was the one. How does this relate to the Atonement? Although there are billions of different people, Christ knows each of us individually because He has *felt* the nooks, crannies, and shape of our lives (see Isaiah 53:4). He therefore knows us and can help us individually.



Because the Atonement is vital for everyone, we have a special challenge for you. Review this chapter and prepare a short lesson based on the question “What is the Atonement, and what does it mean to me?” Then, teach the lesson to somebody you know. You will strengthen the person you teach, and as you teach others about the Atonement, this doctrine will sink even deeper into your heart.

## Still Have Questions?

### *Does God really care about me?*

There are three scriptures that we love that answer this question. Please know that these words are the voice of the Lord directly to you. God has said, “I know thee by name” (Exodus 33:12), “I have loved thee with an everlasting love” (Jeremiah 31:3), and “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5). We testify to you that God knows your name, He loves you, and He will never leave you. *He loves you.* He has promised, “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you” (John 14:18). We know this promise is true.

*I've been praying for strength, but my life is still hard.  
What can I do to have the strength to keep going?*



The prophet Nephi also faced a series of difficult struggles. Once his brothers tied him up with cords and left him in the wilderness to be eaten by wild beasts. Nephi wrote,

But it came to pass that I prayed unto the Lord, saying: O Lord, according to my faith which is in thee, wilt thou deliver me from the hands of my brethren; yea, even give me strength that I may burst these bands with which I am bound.

And it came to pass that when I had said these words, behold, the bands were loosed from off my hands and feet. (1 Nephi 7:17–18)

When we were younger, we used to think that Nephi became like a superhero and broke the ropes with one mighty pull. But Elder David A. Bednar taught,

I personally do not believe the bands with which Nephi was bound just magically fell from his hands and wrists. Rather, I suspect he was blessed with both persistence and personal strength beyond his natural capacity, that he then “in the strength of the

Lord” (Mosiah 9:17) worked and twisted and tugged on the cords and ultimately and literally was enabled to break the bands. . . .

. . . As you and I come to understand and employ the enabling power of the Atonement in our personal lives, we will pray and seek for strength to change our circumstances rather than praying for our circumstances to be changed.<sup>12</sup>

The Lord gave Nephi the strength to keep twisting and tugging on those ropes. He will give you the strength to move forward in your difficult circumstances. Remember the Atonement is not only to cleanse us from sin, it is also to strengthen us and give us the power to do things we could not accomplish with our own capabilities.

*What if I've done too many bad things to ever be forgiven?*

First, we need to understand that Christ’s Atonement is infinite. (That’s more than a duotrigintillion googolplex—which is a real number, by the way!)

Something that is “infinite” has no beginning and no end. You cannot take anything away from it, and you can’t add anything to it. It is *infinite*.

The scriptures teach us that Jesus Christ’s Atonement is “an infinite atonement” (2 Nephi 9:7; Alma 34:12). In other words, Christ’s power to help you in your life has no end. It goes on forever. Whatever sins you have committed, whatever trials you have had, whatever strength you need, Christ has the power to heal, lift, cleanse, and empower you. He will not run out of strength. His power is truly infinite; you can always count on Him.

*My Christian friends ask if Mormons believe in “being saved by grace.” Do we?*

Being saved by grace simply means “the divine help and strength we receive through the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>13</sup> That help includes the ability to do good works, receive forgiveness for our sins, and be blessed by the power of resurrection—all of which

comes through the grace of Christ and makes it possible for us to go to heaven.

In fact, being saved by grace is one of the central themes of the Book of Mormon. Lehi taught, “There is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah” (2 Nephi 2:8). Jacob taught, “It is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved” (2 Nephi 10:24). Nephi said, “For we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23). And Moroni closed the Book of Mormon by saying, “By the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ” (Moroni 10:32).

Although your friends might understand the doctrine of grace differently than you do, you can truthfully say, “Mormons believe in Christ’s grace, and I believe that it is only through the grace of Christ that I can go to heaven.”



Scan this QR code or visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EpFhS0dAduc> to hear one apostle’s testimony of the power of Christ’s Atonement.



Scan this QR code or visit <https://lds.org/youth/video/he-will-give-you-help> to see how the Atonement helped one young man through a difficult trial.



# Teach the Plan!

## God's Greatest Gift: The Atonement of Jesus Christ

**Objective:** To help learners understand both what the doctrine of the Atonement is and how it can change their lives.

**Attention Getter:** Teach the Plan #1: Read the scenarios given by the four teenagers. Ask your family how they think the Atonement could help each of these individuals. After you have studied about the various powers of the Atonement, ask your children which aspects of the Atonement might apply to each situation.

**Discussion Question:** Ask your children to respond to the question, "What is the Atonement of Jesus Christ?" The discussion following Teach the Plan #2 contains possible answers to this question.

**Visual:** Teach the Plan #3: Ask your children to draw a picture of what they think might be the most important event in history. After reviewing the pictures, ask, "Why is the Atonement the greatest event that has ever happened in the history of the world?"

**Lesson Activity:** Teach the Plan #4: Have your family explain the four aspects of the Savior's Atonement. Go to <http://seek.deseretbook.com/bigpicture> and download a handout that has each section on its own page. Give one page to four different people in your family. Let each read their page and then have them teach the other family members what they learned. Remember to include and answer the following discussion questions.

**Discussion Questions:** The following questions may help your children in understanding, identifying, and applying some gospel truths related to the Atonement of Jesus Christ:

Teach the Plan #5: "How does the story from Elder D. Todd Christofferson help us understand that we need to repent of even small sins?"

Teach the Plan #6: "How did Anne experience the understanding power of the Atonement? How have you experienced this power in your life?"

Teach the Plan #7: "How has the Atonement of Jesus Christ given you strength?"

Teach the Plan #8: "How can the Savior's Atonement change our very natures? How has the Atonement changed parts of your nature?"



**Object Lesson:** Do the Experiment upon the Word activity. Afterward, share your testimony with your family about how Christ knows and loves each of us individually. Invite others to bear their testimony as well.

**Role-Play:** Teach the Plan #9: Have your children role-play Nephi's experience of breaking the bands. Were your children successful with one big burst? Or were constant, persistent tugs more useful? Read the quote by Elder David A. Bednar, and then ask, "How does this relate to the strengthening power of the Atonement?"

**Videos:** Watch one or both of the video clips at Teach the Plan #10.

**Invitation to Act:** Encourage your children to accept the invitation offered at the Live the Plan icon. Consider if there is a person or family that you could invite into your home to be taught by your children. Such an individual could be an investigator, a less-active member, or a widow in the ward who would be willing to be taught by your children.