



THE

Word,

YOUR

Life,

AND YOUR

Practice

BY ED J. PINEGAR

I am one of those who believe you don't compartmentalize life. The gospel should be in everything you do, no matter what job you have, no matter what function you perform. You can use the strength of the Lord in all things he calls you to do.

Illustrations by NANCY ANDERSON

Let us start out with your life as a physician, because you deal with disease. In a way, you are the instrument in the hand of the Lord to help the mind and body overcome disease. You prescribe, you do surgery, you may perform any manner of functions that will cause a blessing of healing to come upon a person. I would like to talk about the etiology of sin and nefarious behavior. The medicine for the soul is the medicine of eternal life. My body may eventually become very weak. I may lose my hair. (I love Alma 40:23: "Yea, even a hair of the head shall not be lost.") I may lose many, many things. But eventually my soul will live forever.

So now let us examine how spiritual disease—the power of the adversary—causes you to be not as good as you can be. There are some precursors, or beginning happenings, in a soul that cause one to separate oneself from God. These I list as the 11 causes of sins of behavior, as well as sins of the spirit. When you do something because of these, you commit sin:

PRIDE

Pride was the downfall of the Jaredite nation, the Nephite nation, and every person on the earth who chooses to sin.

GREED

In 1 Timothy 6:10 we read, "The love of money is the root of all evil"; if money becomes our god, our idol, it soon becomes our destruction rather than a blessing to bless others, as Jacob says in the Book of Mormon.

LUST

Lust is the downfall of so many. David, walking on his roof, saw a beautiful woman, Bathsheba, whose husband was Uriah. Later King David said, "Uriah, you're such a good man, you lead us into battle." And of course we know Uriah was killed in an ensuing attack. Then David said, "Bathsheba, come live with me." And so lust was the downfall of the great, great King David.

SELFSHINESS

Selfishness is a universal problem. It weakens the fiber of every marriage that fails. A married couple visits a counseling service or group, and a counselor says, "What you're not doing, Mr. and Mrs. Jones, is communicating. This is your problem. If you don't communicate, what do you do? Here, let me teach you some communication skills. Let me teach you about interpersonal relationships and how to develop some listening skills." So the husband and wife go home and say,

"We've got it now"—yet they fail again. Why? Because they remain selfish, despite whatever they do.

Selfishness is the beginning of the downfall of nearly every marriage relationship. The problem isn't just finances. It isn't just communication. I don't know anybody in the world who can't learn to talk to other people. Sometimes they choose not to communicate, because they're afraid to put themselves at risk or because they're self-centered.

JEALOUSY

Oh, the green dragon of jealousy! According to NAC 67:10, when there is jealousy, you can't see God: "Strip yourselves from jealousies and fears, and [sufficiently] humble yourselves before me, . . . [and] the veil shall be rent." Jealousy, a killer, like all of these temptations, can be conquered with love.

APATHY

Apathy, not hate, is the antithesis of love. If love is ultimate concern that brings about righteous service, then apathy is the opposite: you have no concern. The disease of apathy destroys many.

IGNORANCE

I graduated from BYU in biochemistry and mathematics, then went on and did some chemical and industrial engineering work for a year before I went to dental school; so I tell my students, "Yes, I have a college education, a doctorate—stick it in my ear. It has no exalting value." You see, what we do on earth as a profession does not gain our exaltation. It is how we practice our profession that makes the difference. Whether I am a custodian or a doctor, it matters not. It is how we do the work that God has blessed us to do. It is ignorance of the kingdom of God and the word of God that becomes a great sin.

THE PRECEPTS OF MEN

We can all see clearly what has happened in a world today that follows the precepts of men. If you watch TV and believe the precepts taught on this one-eyed monster, what would you conclude is the only place on this earth where you can really have fun, and what must you be doing? Drinking beer on a beach in a designer swimsuit. That's what we're taught. You can't have fun anywhere else. That's what the precepts of men teach our children. And we wonder why our children do what they do! The precepts of men make sinful behavior a model. The precepts of men destroy the souls of men.

THE FEAR OF MEN

This is the killer of missionary work and of all aspects of the threefold mission of the Church: Come unto Christ and help perfect the Saints, proclaim the gospel, and redeem the dead. Why don't we open our mouths? Because of the fear of men. Many scriptures back the Lord's statement that he is not pleased with us when we don't open our mouths. The fear of men is often the first symptom of spiritual disease.

ANGER

Oh anger! You beloved brothers and sisters see it in your practices: Somebody becomes angry; then they abuse one of God's children. Anger is in their heart, and they express it. Sin results.

HYPOCRISY

Holier than thou, and yet most wicked. We become unrighteously judgmental without being righteous ourselves. A "beam" is in our eye, but we see only the "mote" in the eye of another.

All these are a result of carnal desires and a spirit weakened by improper spiritual nutrition, of our choosing to serve Satan rather than God. Carnal desires are the promptings of the "natural man." King Benjamin, in his great address, describes this unrepentant man as "an enemy to God" (Mosiah 16:5). So that becomes the great question: Are we repenting so as to be on the Lord's side, or are we continuing to serve sin? It is important that we be in the process of repenting, in the proper state of mind to nourish our spirits.

My body needs proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, minerals, water, and goodly amounts of oxygen. As you can see, I'm doing pretty well. I'm pretty healthy. I have my asthma inhaler with me. I took my Dyazide this morning. My blood pressure is down, and I'm feeling terrific. My body is doing okay. In the gospel of Mark, if you will recall the scene, the disciples have fallen asleep; then the Lord says, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41). We have wrested that scripture to mean that the body is the problem and conclude, "I've got the best spirit, but my body is bad." So we look at our bodies as causing our sin. But if we look back to premortality, we remember that there were no bodies, yet billions turned away from God.

You need not have a body to sin. You do need an unwilling heart to sin. Our soul is made up of body and spirit. Our spirit metabolizes only one kind of food. It requires just one thing, and that one thing is the word of God. The word of God is the power source of the spirit.

It is the food of the spirit. It is the food of the eternal soul. Man must live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. This is the premise, a given. This is where you must begin—by reading the scriptures.

Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). Faith is the foundation of all righteousness. Faith dwells independently in God. Faith is the moving cause for all action. Faith generates the power to do all things. The first degree of faith is belief; faith is a multifaceted diamond, a kernel of goodness. Without it, we cannot have hope, and without hope, there can be no charity. So faith is the beginning, or as the Prophet Joseph Smith said, the foundation of all righteousness; and that righteousness comes from hearing the word of God. Let us seize on the word of God and do something with it.

Since we are, in a sense, scientists, we often do experiments. So it's natural that we should want to experiment upon the word and taste of its fruit (Alma 32:42). Some might say, "Brother Ed, I read the scriptures, but I'm not doing very well." The other day out at the institute where I teach, a good person came to see me and unfolded his life. He had lost his fellowship in the Church because of moral transgressions, and he said, "But I read the scriptures every day, and I thought I was doing the prescribed things, but then when temptation came, I fell. Why didn't the scriptures protect me? Why didn't the word of God help me more? I was holding to the rod—the iron rod; what was my problem?"

The Lord told Alma to tell the people how to conduct a great experiment; the problem with the word is that people don't pay the price to make the word strong.

You great physicians tell a patient, "This is what I want you to do. I want you to eat such and such. Take your vitamins. Rest. Take these antibiotics. Within seven days, if you're basically healed, you will be feeling better; you'll have a feeling of well being." Then the patient may say, "My doctor is the greatest doctor in the world." But the patient goes home and reasons, "Hey, I'm feeling pretty good today. I don't need the antibiotics." So blood levels decrease, and disease starts to increase. The patient decides to stay out late, so there is no rest, and then he or she decides that the vitamin regimen really isn't that important. The seed had been planted. Everything was properly prescribed. The word was given. The diagnosis was proper. You performed well. You the doctor gave the best advice and the best medication needed. That is like the word of God. People have it, but then they don't do with it what they have been told to do, so they fail and become spiritually sick.

The prescription for healthy souls is the word planted in our hearts: "But . . . nourish the word, yea, nourish the tree as it becometh to grow; by your faith with great diligence, and with patience" (Alma 32:41). That is the prescription, the formula: faith; diligence; good, heartfelt works; might, mind, and strength; endurance

to the end; and patience. D&C 123:37 tells us that we should do all these things, look forward to the fruits, then stand back, and the arm of the Lord will manifest itself and bless us, as we wait upon him. And the fruit of the tree is what? The love of God. And the love of God is the source of all what? Happiness. The design of our existence is to be happy. There can be no happiness without the love of God.

We read in 4 Nephi 1:13 that the people, who had just been taught by the Lord, were very good—as good as any people had ever been: “And it came to pass that there was no contention in all the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people.” The fruit that grows from these conditions is the love of God; it’s the fruit of the tree—“a tree, whose fruit was desirable [above all other things] to make one happy” (4 Nephi 8:20).

So happiness depends on the love of God. You obtain the love of God only if you hold to the iron rod—the work of God—and partake of the fruit. “These were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, . . . nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God” (4 Nephi 1:16). That’s the love of God, the fruit spoken of in Alma 32:41–43:

Looking forward to the fruit thereof, it shall take root [in your heart]; and behold it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life. And because of your diligence and your faith and your patience with the word in nourishing it, that it may take root in you, behold, by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, pure above all that is pure; and ye shall fruit upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst. Then, my brethren, ye shall reap the rewards of your faith, and your diligence, and patience, and long-suffering, waiting for the tree to bring forth fruit unto you.

That promise makes me happy, because now I know what I have to do—I must cling to the word. The word is everything. The word is a manifestation of Christ.

In 1 Nephi 1:24 we read, “And it shall come to pass, that if the Gentiles shall hearken unto the Lamb of God in that day that he shall manifest himself unto them in word.” Christ is manifest in the word. If we believe in the word, we will believe in Christ. The gospel of John teaches that the word was with God, and the word came to the earth, and the word was made flesh, and the word was Jesus Christ (John 1:14). Here the word is the personification of Christ.

In D&C 68:3,4 we learn “that they [those ordained to the priesthood] shall speak as they are moved upon by the Holy Ghost. And whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture, shall be the will of the Lord, . . . shall be the word of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation. It is the scripture? It is the power of God unto salvation. This word, then, literally has power. Now you understand why, when he was speaking to the Zoramites, Alma testified that the greatest power to change men’s lives is the power of the word (Alma 31:5). He “thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue,” here meaning power, power of the word upon them. The word has a greater power to change men’s souls than anything else.

A failing parent is not one who has a wayward child, but one who gives up on the child and does not lean on the word of the Lord. Enos was going to hunt the beasts of the forest. He was probably middle-aged, good-looking, and strong. He was hunting the beasts of the forest, and what happened? All of a sudden, the words he had heard his father speak to him concerning eternal life sunk deep into his heart. He knelt and prayed for the welfare of his soul because of the word. Perhaps Enos’ father, Jacob, had thought, “I don’t know if Enos is hearing me. Maybe Enos isn’t paying attention to me.”

Alma the younger, baddest of the bad, along with Ammon, Omner, Hianni, and Aaron, went about raising havoc throughout the Church. Alma and his people prayed so hard that the angel came and called the young men to repentance. Before any of you think, “Well, if I had an angel, I’d be good, too,” remember Laman and Lemuel. An angel is not enough. There must be a change of heart, and you must have faith. Alma heard the word, and then, as explained to his son Helaman, he was harrowed up by his sins, and then his mind caught hold of words his father had spoken concerning the one—Jesus Christ—who would atone for all the sins of the world; and as his mind caught hold of that, he said, “O . . . God, have mercy on me” (Alma 36:18). It was the word that made the difference in Alma’s family.

King Benjamin went up to Zarahemla, where the people were the Mulekites. Mulek, the son of King Zedekiah, left home in 586 B.C. when the Babylonians conquered the nation of Judah. When the Mulekites left their land, they came to America, but they forgot something—their scriptures and their doctrine. When King Benjamin met them, their language had become corrupted, and they no longer worshipped God. King Benjamin said that his fathers would have been like them had they not had the word.

Why is there disbelief in families today? Because there is so little family home evening, so little family

scripture time, so little family council, so few family interviews, and so little family prayer. There is little hearing of the word of God, which is the basis for every one of those activities. So unbelief. King Benjamin said, comes because the word is not there. The word has potential to become powerful. In the tree of life vision, only those who held to the iron rod and resisted peer pressure partook of the fruit. This partaking must be a daily activity; we must partake of the word regularly.

What can the word do? Let’s go back to our “dis-eases,” our sins. Let’s take pride, for example. Alma had just given up the chief judgeship to Nephiha, so he could go out and knock on doors.

He simply wanted to be a missionary. He felt that he should go forth among the people of Nephi, that he might preach the word of God to them to stir them up to remembrance. That is power. It’s what every Nephite prophet did when his people were doing bad things. He would ask, “Have you forgotten the goodness of our father bringing us across the great deep? Have you forgotten when we came out of Egypt? Have you forgotten? Oh remember, remember!”

That’s why I wore a penny in my shoe for six years until I started to limp—just to remind me, Ed, don’t forget. In my dental office above every intercom was one word: remember. Every morning, one word, remember—the goodness of God, remember—your duty. What is our duty? To pull down by the word of God all the pride, craftiness, and contention that are among the people and to overcome all these things.

Love casts out all fears. Love destroys jealousy. Love leads one to obedience. Love helps us exercise faith. Love creates a win-win proposition; it counters greed. Love of fellow beings destroys lust. According to Moroni, love is not puffed up (Moroni 7:45). Love is not easily provoked to anger. Love minigates selfishness. In short, love is the power to conquer. It’s like the ultimate antibiotic. That’s why the Lord says in Matthew 22:40, “On these [the commandments of love] hang all the law and the prophets.” That’s why God’s love is the motive for all of his actions. “For God so loved the

world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

In D&C 96:5 we read that the word nourishes and softens the heart. Helaman 3:29 teaches us that our mission in life is to cross the gulf of misery to eternal life, and it is the word that takes us across that gulf. Alma, in blessing his son Helaman, said that there was a type and shadow in the Liahona—that compass, that director—and this is it: If you lay hold to the word of God, it will lead you in a straight course back to eternal life. The word has power to change men’s lives and direct them in all things. That’s the Liahona, the word, in your life.

Sometimes we think, “Hey, things are okay. Things are fine. Everything’s good. I’m making a good living. I have a job in the Church. Things are great.” We become self-sufficient. Brothers and sisters, self-sufficiency is like the little virus that you might breathe in. Someone sneezes. You get just a whiff of it. That virus, like self-sufficiency, breeds; it grows and grows. You say, “I can do this. I know how to cure these people. They come to me. All my patients love me. They’re all getting well. This is great!” But you have forgotten who is the healer of healers. At this point the self-sufficiency starts to turn into pride, and it becomes a problem.

When we’re self-sufficient, we no longer depend on God. When we don’t depend

on God, we lose our humility. Without humility there can be no spiritual growth. So self-sufficiency in this sense is the direct opposite of depending on the Lord and keeping yourself humble. In Jacob’s wonderful sermon in 2 Nephi 9:28,29, notice whose plan this is to make us self-sufficient: “O that cunning plan of the evil one! O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish. But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God.” To be a great



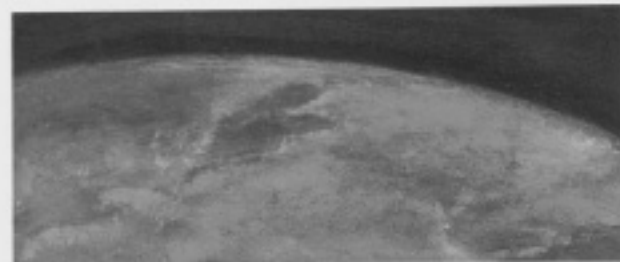
THE FRUIT THAT GROWS FROM THESE CONDITIONS IS THE LOVE OF GOD; IT’S THE FRUIT OF THE TREE—“A TREE, WHOSE FRUIT WAS DESIRABLE [ABOVE ALL OTHER THINGS] TO MAKE ONE HAPPY.”

physician is good; but to be a great father is good; to be a great person is good; to be a great wife, mother, or daughter is good—but only if we hearken unto the counsels of God. What do we call those counsels? The word of God.

All the learning of man will pass away. I always smile when I think of what the scientists of NASA have done. The Challenger circles the earth. Brothers and sisters, put that in perspective: try putting in orbit a sphere 8,000 miles in diameter and more than 23,000 miles in circumference, with adequate materials to sustain life. Oh, by the way, create a nearly perfect axis, and spin that orb so that gravity and the seasons will be just right. Put

fail to teach properly, the sin be upon our heads. I teach hundreds of kids, and I cry a lot. I was a happy dentist. I enjoyed my profession. I loved every day of my work. Now I look out and see these kids who come from broken homes; I say something and look in their eyes and see the hurt. I think, "Heavenly Father, help them, because they have to be transitional persons." Maybe pain has touched your home. If it has, my heart aches. I pray that we will all be able to make changes for the better. But we have to teach this generation to keep the covenant by the power of the word.

Some people are subclinically ill. It's said that all of us are subclinically ill. People may be functioning, but



in a system we call the solar system, for beings who could populate the earth and prove themselves worthy to come here. Now do we feel puny enough? You see, that's what God can do. That's what the Savior did do.

I think of when I used to go to the hospital and do my oral surgery. After I did the work, and the patients would come out and feel good, I'd feel pleased that they were alive. I would get very nervous when the anesthesiologist was there working with me. I'd say, "Hey, the chest—"

He'd reply, "That's okay. I have him 'bagged' now."

Then I'd answer, "Don't bag him. You just keep pumping that bag. I want to see that chest going up and down all the time I'm working." I was a nervous wreck. I didn't have faith.

Do you know how God does it? He spoke, and the world was. He speaks, and mountains move. He speaks, and the dust obeys (Helaman 12:8). Read Abraham 3:4, which tells about when the gods created the earth, how they spoke and watched until they were obeyed. All the elements honor God—that's why they obey. So we see now that all of this can come to pass if we do not set it aside, supposing we know of ourselves.

What is our duty as mothers and fathers? It is to teach our children the word of God. *D&C* 68:25–28 tells us that if we do not teach our children (and our grandchildren and everybody else in our stewardship as a teacher), the sin be upon the heads of the parents. If we

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in reality their bodies are not functioning at their best, and so different things are taken from this part or that part in order for these people to function. There is no quick, antibiotic solution to subclinical illness. Is that fair? Perhaps yes, perhaps no. Long, dedicated, faithful, diligent, patient work restores wholeness, as does nourishing the word.

Now to your practice. Why do some of us have growing, abundant practices? Because of how we are perceived. How are you perceived by your patients? If the love of God is in your heart, you will radiate it to your patients. If the love of God is not in your heart, you will not.

Every day that I did invasive work in my practice, I would later dial the patient on the phone and say, "Hi, Bill, how are you feeling? Is the numbness out now? Does it feel pretty good? If you need any help, you give me a call." And to this day, every time my son enters a person's body with a needle or a drill or a new crown or anything, he makes a telephone call to communicate. "I care. How can I help?" Every patient who walks in the door later receives in the mail a handwritten note: "Thanks for allowing us the privilege of taking care of your dental and oral cavity needs. We are glad to help you. If you ever have any trouble, you just let us know."

"You know," I told my son, "if you don't love your patients like you do the members of your priests quorum or the members of the ward when you were a high-

op or the members of your stake when you were in the stake presidency, son, you won't be the kind of dentist who can bless people's lives."

You don't realize the things you can do. Sometimes you might think you should separate all religion and politics from your practice. Well, I guess that might be right. I have to confess I never did. I'll never forget the day in my practice when a young man came in and I asked, "How's school going, Rob?"

He answered, "Lousy. I hate it."

I continued, "You mean you hate *us*?"

He said it was horrible, and then he used the term youth say to mean "very bad." I said, "What about your Book of Mormon class?"

He said, "Doctor Ed, I am not a Mormon." I felt like I'd come down with foot in mouth disease.

You know what happened? I no longer spoke, but something came out of my mouth, and these were the words: "Rob, a guy like you ought to be one." I just looked at him with the same expression I normally have and finished working on his teeth.

Six weeks later the phone rang. I wasn't there, but this was the message: "Tell Dr. Pinegar thanks. Something happened when he looked in my eyes that day. I couldn't wait to get out of his office. I went straight home, called up the stake missionaries and asked them to come immediately and teach me the gospel of Jesus Christ. I'm baptized today. Just tell him thanks." It was the Lord who did that.

What I'm saying is this: You don't realize the missionary work you can do within your practice. You will bless their lives by helping patients to be well and have a feeling of well-being as individuals; but there are times when you can touch their hearts with the love of God in such a way that they won't call you a blessed doctor, but a blessed friend who saved their lives. This is very important.

Now I come to a touchy subject. How long do your patients have to wait in your office? Remember that movie called *The Doctor*? The doctor gets sick and all of a sudden he gets a new view of things from the other side. This may sound foolish to you, but here is what I used to do. When a person waited over 15 minutes, I wrote him or her a check. One day a patient waited a half hour, so I wrote him a check for \$25. He protested, "You can't do this."

I insisted, "Oh yes I can. I'm your doctor, and you're obedient to what I ask you to do, aren't you?"

He conceded, "Well, yes."

I continued, "Well then, okay. You take this money and go bless your wife and take her out to dinner." (Today that wouldn't be enough money to do it—that's how long ago it was.)

My point is this: Charity suffers long, and we do what we can. It may be only a phone call. It is nice

when someone phones to say, "Hey, I'm running a little late. Don't come just yet." Who am I to judge? I'm the greatest sinner of anyone here. There are people who sit and wait, and their time is also precious. If they are having to wait, you just say, "I'm late. I'm behind. Will you please forgive me?"

Do you know what they'll say? "I went to a doctor, and he begged my forgiveness today. He said he was late because he had been helping some other people in an emergency."

I know your life is not your own. And you know, 99 percent of the time it is not your fault for being late, because you are always helping someone. When someone's hurting, you always help. I'll start to cry if I think about you too much. When I see a physician, I see a partner with God. You see, I wanted to be one, but my mama was a widow, and we didn't have the money. I wanted to be a heart surgeon, because my father died of a heart condition; so I took the second best route. As a dentist, I can smile and still help people. But deep in my heart, I always wanted to be one of you. I can't think of a more holy calling on earth than to bless Heavenly Father's children every day of your life—and still pay tithing.

Be organized in that which you do, so as to remember this: You are an instrument in the hands of the Lord to bless Heavenly Father's children, and you can help them love the Lord just by saying, "Oh, I'm so glad you're feeling good. Isn't the Lord great?" Who do you give credit to for the healing? Give credit where it is due; then you can experience the joy Alma did in being an instrument in the hand of the Lord to bring some souls to conversion or make some souls well by healing their bodies.

Brothers and sisters, communicate this with love; then you'll always be happy in your work. I wondered what the Lord thinks of success, so I quickly asked my computer what the Book of Mormon thought success was. It was this: "Go amongst thy brethren, the Lamanites, and bear with patience thine afflictions, and I will give unto you success [and bring them to Christ]" (*Alma* 26:27). "Yea, and that same God did establish his church among them; yea, and that same God hath called me by a holy calling, to preach the word unto this people, and hath given me much success, in the which my joy is full" (*Alma* 29:13).

Healers of the sick in partnership with God, may you understand that the word is the key to feeding the spirit. That we will use it to bring us back to the presence of our Father is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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