

# “Reclaiming The Power Of Selfless Service” by Paul

[April 5th, 2025, First Reform Mormon General Conference](#)

Hi there. My name is Paul, and I'm a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I live in Melbourne, Florida and when I heard about this conference for Reform Mormonism I asked whether or not that I could record a video tape talk for the conference, and so I'd like to speak to you for just a couple of minutes on the subject, “Reclaiming the Power of Selfless Service”. I testify to you that it's important for us to model the example of Jesus in everything that we do, and that we should meet the needs of people for who they are, as they are, where they are. Makes no difference what their color is whether they have faith or no faith at all; rich, poor, straight, gay, lesbian, transgender; [it] makes no difference where you find people in this world. You meet the needs of people for who they are as they are where they are.

I'm reminded of a quote from John Wesley, the founder or one of the founders of the United Methodist Church. He said:

Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, for as long as you ever can.

And it was Voltaire who said:

Every man is guilty of all the good that he did not do.

Then Edmund Burke came along and he said

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.

I believe that we should model the example of Christ in all that we do. Jesus Christ modeled that example in everything that he said and everything that he did. From the multiplying of the loaves and fishes to the 5,000, to the woman taken in the act of adultery when people that were there were mostly people from the religious community and basically they were looking at Jesus and laughing and they were basically saying “which of us should stone her first?” And Jesus said to them, he said, “Ye who are without sin cast the first stone.” And then as he reached down and he began to write in the dirt - and scripture doesn't bear this out, but I'm convinced of it, just simply in my opinion nothing more, that he was able to write in the dirt everything that those men standing around with the woman taken in the act of adultery, that he was able to write in the dirt everything that those men had ever done. And then he turned and he looked at the woman and he said, “where are your accusers?” And she said, “Lord, there are none.” And he said, “neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more”.

That is truly selfless service to others. To know that a person is going through difficult times in their life and for Jesus to say, go and sin no more. He met the needs of that woman taken in the act of adultery. He met her needs for who she was, where she was, as she was. And he said, “neither do I condemn thee.”

We serve Jesus, who is the happy God, who is the savior of all and the condemner of none.

And you know, Dennis Prager said:

Goodness is about character, integrity, honesty, kindness, generosity, moral courage, and the like more than anything else. It is about how we treat other people.

Dr. Martin Luther King said:

The time is always right to do what is right.

And he also said that:

Everybody can be great because everybody can serve.

I leave you my witness, my good brothers and sisters watching this video, that we need to be true servants of Jesus Christ in everything that we say and everything that we do. Model through our words and not just our words, through our actions, what the true, pure love of Christ is all about. The Book of Mormon calls charity the pure love of Christ. That is what we need to model to others, the pure love of Jesus Christ.

And in the end, as Paul the Apostle said:

There are but three things: faith, hope, and love. And the greatest of these is love.

Of these things, I bear you my witness and do so humbly in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

# “Priesthood as Your Divine Birthright” by Sarah Williams

[April 6th, 2025. First Reform Mormon General Conference](#)

Hi, I'm Sister Sarah Williams and I want to talk to you about priesthood, but more specifically my experience of priesthood, and in order to do that I need to start at the beginning of my story.

It's important for me to convey that I can't really remember a time that my faith wasn't important to me. I was born to a recent convert family. I was born in the late '80s they had converted in the early 80s to kids - to teenagers 15 and 16, unmarried.

When I was eventually explained this it wasn't pitched to me as something that was shameful. My granny - I was raised by my grandparents, my dad's parents - my granny told me that she just thought that it meant that my Heavenly Father had needed me at a certain age at a certain time in these latter days and he just couldn't wait anymore. She would tell me with pride about a member of the 70 visiting our branch in Arkansas and seeing my mom - before she had told anyone that she was pregnant - and telling her that the one she carried was special.

This was all presented to me as sign as evidence of calling and I took it all very seriously from a very young age. I remember before even starting school I was very prayerful, always trying to make sure that I was living up to whatever my calling was.

My family did fall away from the church, but when I got to high school I found I had a Mormon classmate and she invited me to church and I invited my family and they were moved or embarrassed enough to go. From that point I became very active. I began to serve as the second counselor in my priest Quorum, my pop got a calling cleaning the chapel and then working at the food bank and then building for the Church Ranch in the in the Deseret Ranch in Florida.

I was always right there with him, you know? I was very eager to go home teaching with him. I always wanted to be a assisting however I could with preparing, passing, and eventually blessing the sacrament. I remember blessing the sacrament right next to my pop and how emotionally powerful that was for me, and still how that memory is for me. It just it meant a lot to me to be able to live out my calling, to do the things that I had been told told that my Heavenly Father needed me to do. I'd been ordained to the priesthood in the Church of my father and I felt the weight and the glorious attraction of doing the work - of being a priest - and of using that priesthood power to lighten the load of other Saints, to heal, to teach, to comfort, and to cast a light.

So it was devastating to me when I realized that I didn't fit in. I didn't fit in in a number of ways, but the one that would become the most troublesome to serving any calling in the LDS church was my gender. As a transwoman, church just was no longer a very welcoming place for me, and I became aware of this years before I was brave enough to come out. I spent years - almost two decades - investigating other spiritualities looking to fill a hole that had been left by my church being lost to me. I studied druidry, Celtic spirituality, Daoism, Buddhism, and some really

out there ones like Jediism, but there was always something missing, you know? I couldn't find what I was really seeking.

The entire time I continued to study Mormonism and its schisms and dissidents in the Restoration movement, and on back through you know primitive Christianity, through Canaanite religion, Sumerian religion, and along that path I started to find my Heavenly Mother as Asherah.

Asherah is a Canaanite goddess, the wife of El. She actually shows up in the Bible, but if you're only reading the King James version you might not know it, because Her name gets mistranslated as "groves" in the King James version, after trees which were a sacred object for Her. We find evidence of this in prohibitions about planting Groves too close to shrines to El - or Yahweh - all through the Old Testament. We see evidence of Her in Jeremiah, where Jeremiah is criticizing the people for praying to the Queen of Heaven and they answer to him that they're going to do it anyway; we see this in Jeremiah 44:17-19. It says "We will certainly do everything we said we would. We will burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and we will pour out drink offerings to Her just as we and our ancestors, our Kings and officials, did in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem. At that time we had plenty of food and we were all well off and suffered no harm, but ever since we stopped burning incense to the Queen of Heaven and pouring out drink offerings to Her we have had nothing and have been perishing by sword and famine." The women added "When we burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and poured out drink offerings to Her, did not our husbands know that we were making cakes impressed with Her image and pouring out drink offerings to Her?" I just found that very powerful, and when I got my new scriptures I actually highlight that passage very first.

I also found evidence of our Heavenly Mother in the Shekhinah which is this kabbalistic concept of the feminine nature of God, and following this concept back I found um Astarte, Ishtar, Isis, Inanna, which all these same sort of energy; this mother goddess energy. In fact, in regards to Inanna, the earliest writings that we have by an author whose name that we know of are by an author named Enheduanna, and she was writing hymns for Inanna. Those are very special hymns to me too.

So I began to feel like I'd been trained as a priest in my father's house just so that I could find my Heavenly Mother, and that maybe my calling lay there. I felt I hadn't been welcome in my father's house, but that my Mother was welcoming me with arms wide, and I could feel Her love when I would pray to Her.

My best friend Laura and I, on Mother's Day in 2001, published a document announcing the formation of "A Church of Mother", but still something was missing for me.

So let's talk about priesthood. I stand before you as someone who was ordained in the house of my father, but found herself unwelcome there, and when I left the church I felt as if I had lost access to my priesthood; that by stepping into my true self I had surrendered something sacred. However, it was hard to feel it as a loss, because I felt such liberation, and I came to understand that my priesthood was not something that was ever theirs to take or to give; it had always just been mine.

So we're taught that priesthood is "power and authority to act in God's name", but that authority is only as real as the power behind it, and true power doesn't come from institutional permission but it comes from our Heavenly Parents and our Divine nature as their children; as "gods in becoming". Doctrine and Covenants 121:36 states, "the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of Heaven cannot be controlled nor handled; only upon the principles of righteousness." The key word here is "inseparably". If the priesthood is truly inseparable from the powers of Heaven, then no mortal institution can take it away; it cannot be severed from those who live in righteousness.

Even the adversary himself retains power. Doctrine and Covenants 76: 25-27 speaks of Lucifer who held authority in Heaven before his rebellion, and we learn - and those who have been through Temple ordinances know - that Satan retains his priesthood. So, if even Lucifer, who had engaged in open rebellion against God, can retain his priesthood, then clearly it's not something that can be taken away.

So, if that's the case, then people who are practicing in righteousness even beyond the bounds of the church, there's no way that they could lose access to their priesthood.

The scriptures also show us examples of those who have exercised their priesthood without institutional approval. Alma the Elder in Mosiah 18:12-14 baptized himself and others without being formally ordained by the established religious authority. His priesthood was validated not by an institution, but by his personal righteousness and the spirit of God. This suggests that priesthood is not about hierarchy at all, but about Divine connection. So, if you believe and accept that we are children of God with potential to become like our Heavenly Parents, then priesthood is not an external grant of power but rather an intrinsic part of our Divine nature. As Christ himself says in John 10:34: "Is it not written in your law, I said ye are Gods?" This means priesthood is not something that we must wait to be given; it is already within us, just as Divinity is already within us. When we limit our priesthood to institutional authority we limit our understanding of who we truly are. Priesthood is not just about governance or ordinance; it is about Divine light, the power to comfort, to bless, to heal, and to lead. It is the authority to love and to have compassion. It's the authority of bringing forth light.

Moses 7:18 tells us that "The Lord called his people Zion because they were of one heart and one mind and dwelt in righteousness, and there was no poor among them." Zion is not built through institutional control, but rather through unity, love, and righteousness. If we are to live our lives as our Heavenly Parents would seem to wish for us, we must recognize that our priesthood is not about exclusion, but about bringing forth the power of Heaven in our actions.

So, I wanted believed that my priesthood was something fragile; something that could be taken away from me if I stepped outside of the institution that had ordained me. When I came out as transgender I feared that I had lost it, but then something happened. I had to flee an abusive situation, and when traveling to my new home I got a chance to go through Utah for the first time, and through Salt Lake City, and I went to the Temple Square - to the temple bookstore - and I got my new set of scriptures with my name right on the cover, and that was just a moment of reclaiming my faith for me. I also got a holy oil container, like the one my pop had carried. I got these, because I knew that these were items that were important to me, and that the

priesthood was something that was important to me, and that I was kind of coming back into that but I didn't really understand the path of it yet.

I started to really study. I went through this period where I was as deep in study and prayer as I've ever been in my life, and every day I found myself talking about the gospel to someone, and never really forcing the issue but it was just happening.

My dog got really sick and it looked like she might lose the ability to walk. She hadn't walked in over a week, and I was praying on it, and I felt the spirit move me. It was like, "Hey, you got the oil. Give her a healing blessing." and so I did. I anointed her, I knelt down, I put my hands on her on her head, and I let the Spirit speak to me and I spoke to her. She's here right now. That dog has been with me for nine years, through homelessness, and good times and bad. The very next day after blessing her, she was walking again. I had to keep her from running she was feeling so much better. She was just wanting to play! In that moment I realized that clearly my priesthood was intact, that it was mine, that that connection was still there, that it never belonged to a church, that it was a gift from my Heavenly Parents. It was my birthright.

If that's true for me, then it's true for you. How many have been cast out and told they are unworthy or led to believe that they are powerless? How many have been deceived into thinking that they must seek permission to exercise the gifts that they already hold? That these gifts can be denied them for how they were born, who they love, or who they are? To those who have been told they are unworthy, who have felt cast out, who have wondered whether they are now beyond the reach of Divine power, I say this: you you are not beyond it, for it was never beyond you! Your priesthood was never something they could take! It was never something they could deny! Your right to have it is always within you, a part of your Divine nature as a child of Gods. Awaken to it, and it is yours. Those who would deny you this, what they fear the most is not that you might be lost but that you might awaken to your own immediate connection to the Divine that needs no intermediaries; just love.

In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the father does not withhold inheritance from the wayward child; he welcomes him back with open arms, recognizing that his son never ceased to be his son. So too do our Father and Mother in Heaven see us; they do not take away what is ours by birthright, they only wait for us to claim it. That's my invitation to everyone listening today. Regardless of gender or orientation: claim what has always been yours. Step into the fullness of what priesthood has always been meant to be; not a tool of control, but a birthright of Divine power and creation.

In the end I did find what was missing for me: it was this final truth that my Heavenly Father had never rejected me. As I prayed to my Mother in Heaven, gradually she opened my heart to that final piece of my personal puzzle that I had spent decades in assembling.

Those who claimed that I was an abomination, that my Father had no place for me when I was living my truth, they did not speak on behalf of God but rather on behalf of their own entrenched patriarchy and power. They have no authority to tell me that I am not what I am, nor that I have no place in my Parents' house.

There is a place for you in the House of God, not just in the walls of the church but in the vast eternal expanse of Divine love. You do not need permission to be powerful! You do not need approval to be worthy! You already are! May we walk forward with the knowledge that we are Divine, that we are called, and that nothing can separate us from the power of Heaven that already resides within us.

In conclusion, I just want to add that I was terrified to come out as transgender to my pop. He is who baptized me, who conferred the Aaronic priesthood over me. I didn't think he would take it well, so he was the last person I told in my family. However, when I told him, he was immediately supportive. He told me "If this is what is going to make you feel better, then I want to be there. I want to support you 100% of the way." He told me he didn't really understand it but then he didn't even understand it to accept it. Even that was beyond what I could have hoped for. He came back to me a couple days later, and he told me that he had prayed on it and that he had had a dream wherein Heavenly Father had showed him that trans people get to live out in our perfected bodies in eternity as the gender that we know ourselves to be, and that the only reason that we're not here in mortality is as a special test. He told me that God had shown him that in Heaven I would be me. It is my testimony that this is true, that our Heavenly Parents made some of us trans for the same reason that they have made wheat but not bread, and grapes but not wine. Amen.

# “Non-theism in Restoring the Restoration” by Istvan Jamrik

[April 6th, 2025, First Reform Mormon General Conference](#)

Hello and welcome to everyone attending the first Reform Mormon general conference! My name is István, and I would like to thank everyone for the opportunity that I can speak here today.

I am not an expert in the field of the topics I would like to talk about today, so I would say the main goal of my talk is to facilitate meaningful discussion and hopefully bring us all a bit closer together. My topic is the possible role of non-theists – like myself – in the community of Reform Mormons, but I hope my points are applicable in general to any type of community that is open to a wide range of beliefs or non-beliefs within their ranks.

I would like to talk a little bit about myself. I live in Canada, but I was born and raised in Hungary, a country in Central Europe. Unlike many of the people interested in Reform Mormonism, I did not grow up Mormon; in fact, I did not grow up religious at all. My dad was a staunch atheist, and my mom is more of a mildly spiritual person. In my teenage years, I got caught in the frantic search for my identity. As a result of that, instead of experimenting with other substances, I experimented a bit with Catholicism, Islam, and then I bumped into the Mormons in my hometown, and I ended up joining them. My disillusionment with institutional Brighamite Mormonism - the only kind that truly has a footprint in Hungary – led me to leave a few years later, but my fascination with any and all things Mormon never left me, even as I finally reconciled with being an agnostic atheist.

So, what am I doing here, you may ask? I asked myself the same question many times. Some people I know who are interested in a kind of Mormonism that works for them are people with Mormon ancestry going back many generations, people who feel like they are a part of Mormonism and its wider cultural context regardless of their theological beliefs or ecclesiastical affiliation. I am not such a person. I converted to LDS at age 17 and my family tree is overwhelmingly Catholic. Then there are people who enjoy some of the ritual aspects of Mormonism. Perhaps they like initiatory or endowment ceremonies and they would like to keep practicing those on their own terms. I confess that I am not really one of those people either, although there are ritualistic practices that I do see as potentially very useful. So, what is it that draws someone like me to this initiative?

The first element of that comes from my mindset expanding even after my journey back to atheism. As many new atheists, and also as many people who leave a religious organization that eventually did not work out for them, I did think of religion, especially theistic religion, as a universally harmful phenomenon. Eventually, exploring the ideas of people like John Hamer, a pastor of Community of Christ, or Dan McClellan, a religious scholar and a member of the mainstream Brighamite LDS Church, changed my views about this fundamentally. As difficult as it was to deconstruct my previous literalistic, black-and-white religious views, it was perhaps even harder to deconstruct the idea that equates religion in general with those literalistic, all-or-nothing type worldviews. Thus, I came to see religion, or at least a belief in the supernatural and the quest to find a higher meaning in life, as something that is most likely an



inherent characteristic of human beings, one of many such characteristics. Seeing religion in this light made me realize that letting these innate human needs go completely unexplored may, in some cases, be almost as unhealthy as letting them run completely amok, regardless of consequences. My old atheism, almost like an abstinent, prohibitionist view, thinking that belief in a god or gods is poisonous at any concentration, evolved into an atheism that accepts that as much as religion had caused endless destruction and pain in the world, maybe the solution is trying to practice it together in a safer way, as opposed to the impossible task of extinguishing it.

But how does this make me relate to Reform Mormonism specifically? As I mentioned before, I was a bit of a truth-seeker in my teenage years, which made me relate very deeply to Joseph Smith when I first heard his story. Now, I do not believe he literally communed with gods and angels. I do believe that he, as a young boy, felt suffocated by the religious environment around him when he was growing up, and he needed an outlet for that. He was tired of hearing “you can’t believe it this way; you can’t do it that way”! He needed to do religion on his own terms. Now, while deconstructing my previous beliefs, I also came to realize that after becoming the leading figure of this community, Joseph abused his power in many ways that are absolutely inexcusable. Still, I find that I can relate to the person young Joseph was, and as someone who rejects dogmatism entirely, I believe that exploring religion on our own terms, like he and his fellow early Mormons did, can be a healthy exercise, as long as it is done responsibly. Something that Dan McClellan said once, and I am paraphrasing this, is that humanity never really drew absolute morality from religion. We always used our common moral framework to shape religion to our image and then pretend that we did it the other way. My question is this: why would we not do this in an honest way instead, and form communities with people that share commonalities with our moral framework, even (or especially) if we see religion itself in a thousand different ways?

Another idea that piqued my interest, that I believe first came to me upon watching an interview Evan Sharley and Rob Lauer, was the idea of restoring the Restoration. The rapid growth of Mormonism in Joseph Smith’s time proves that there was a subset of people in the area where it all started who were not satisfied by the mainstream Christianity of the time anymore, and they were drawn to something experimental that claimed to restore some original ideas from the Bible that were not practiced in mainstream Christianity anymore. These movements were called Restorationists, and Mormonism was one of the most successful ones out of them. Obviously, as it often happens, eventually some unfortunate human hierarchies took over, like they previously did with many other religious movements, and parts of Mormonism calcified themselves into the dogmatic systems they were trying to get away from. I started wondering, what did Mormonism get right about this so-called Restoration, and what did they get wrong? Also, in a similar way, since there are people attached to Mormonism in some way, but also not satisfied by its mainstream manifestations: could the Restoration itself be restored, as in, trying to trace back to the good ideas Mormonism started off with, and then go from there?

In my view, there were many good things in the early parts of Mormonism. There was a very communitarian aspect of it, the theory of which I believe to be worth exploring, regardless of how it was eventually abandoned by most Mormon denominations. There was a diversity of voices trying to innovate and bring fresh ideas to the table – of course, with Joseph focusing on

the hierarchical nature of the church and putting himself in the centre, many of these opposing voices were silenced, but what could have been if they were not?

There are some later ideas of Mormonism that I also find interesting. Although I do not believe in a literal progression of humans into gods or divine beings, I have always felt like the idea that once we just fulfilled our obligations, we are done, did not work for me on the long term. I do believe in a kind of eternal progression that concerns every human being to ever live to leave their mark on the continuum of humanity's existence, from ancient times to a hopeful far future. I believe there can be a benefit in trying to synthesize these ideas with each other in our mission to redefine what divinity even means to us.

This brings me to the last thing I would like to discuss, the seeming absurdity of an atheist trying to define what divinity is. Although it may look strange at first, I do not believe that coming from a non-theistic point of view is impossible to reconcile with concepts of the divine. On the contrary, I believe that humanity has already explored in great depth and breadth the theistic ideas of the divine, and in my opinion, it is high time to start offering alternative perspectives on this. Most importantly, I think non-theists as members of open religious movements can help balance out some of the harmful magical thinking that often plagues new movements and encourage healthy discussion and disagreement. In my opinion, demystifying the divine can actually help with understanding it even more, because removing the magical elements tends to help explain it more on the basis of the human condition and human behaviour. Although I believe that being non-theist or atheist does not mean "a person dedicated to fight against anything and everything religious" but also atheists have been on the forefront of fighting against the harmful aspects of religion, and I believe that a type of uncompromising view that sets the alleviation of human suffering before any divine goals does have a place in an open religious movement that seeks similar goals. I do believe that non-theists engaging in healthy discussion with theists, deists, pantheists, etc. can provide counterpoints and balances that are not always present in a group that only has different flavours of theists.

Starting from a point of view that does not have an already preset axiom about God's existence and God's attributes can actually lead to newer understandings of what divinity even means, or how the divine can be meaningful to people, or how it relates to a simple innate morality if we accept that humans are inherently good, and create sacred things that are not merely dependent on reinterpretations of previous religious dogmas. Regardless of our type of individual belief systems, we are all parts of communities and systems that experience common outcomes, therefore if there are people with different belief systems who are seeking the same or similar outcomes, it is actually quite valuable for these people to support each other as part of the same community, and to define what sacredness or divinity could mean to them together. For example, as a Queer person, the experiences, the feelings, the needs of all of my Queer siblings are sacred to me. Not tolerated, not reluctantly accepted, but sacred.

Finally, I am reminded of a story that is circulating on the Internet in different forms, and originally comes from the Hasidic Rabbi Moshe Leib, discussing why God created atheists. Obviously, the Rabbi was a theist, and his position was that even for believers, it is better if they act towards their fellow humans as if there was no God at all, and the only people able to help

their fellow humans were themselves. In a similar way, I interpret the story of the death of Jesus similarly, from a non-theist point of view. To me, nothing could be a more beautiful interpretation of the Jesus message than the one that says: do not look for me to save the world single-handedly! I was crucified, I died, and I left my holy spirit to guide you. Now you have to look within yourselves to find me, meaning that now, you have to take on the mantle of saving the world, by listening to your inherent human morality, forming safe communities, and going forth with love and compassion.

Thank you.

## “Reclaiming Our Conscience” by Rob Lauer

[April 6th, 2025. First Reform Mormon General Conference](#)

On September 11, 1857, fifty devout Mormon men brutally murdered in cold blood at least 120 men, women, and children—including infants—at Mountain Meadows, near Cedar City, Utah. In the immediate aftermath, many of the men were horrified and guilt-ridden by what they had done. Witnesses said that a day later, when the Stake President who had given the final order to exterminate the California-bound wagon train, visited the massacre site and saw the 120 mutilated bodies scattered across the valley, he broke down into tears, sobbing, "I didn't know there were so many of them! I didn't know there were so many." Only one man—John D. Lee—was ever tried, convicted, and executed for the Mountain Meadows Massacre. A handful of the local Church officials who ordered and/or led the massacre spent the rest of their lives as fugitives hiding from Federal authorities. After committing what was until 1995 the worst act of domestic terrorism in U.S. history, most of the murderers simply returned to living their lives—caring for their families, raising children, working at their jobs, serving in church callings, and generally being regarded as honest, upright members of their communities. However, beneath this façade, most were haunted until the day they died by the memory of the horrors they had committed. Outward appearances aside, their consciences seldom gave them a moment's peace.

How could a people who had themselves been victims of ridicule, discrimination, prejudice, and violence—a people who had trekked a thousand miles across the North American continent to escape these things—so quickly, within less than a decade after arriving in their new promised land, commit an act of violence on a scale more massive than any they had suffered? How could seemingly good people not only perpetrate this massacre but also believe—or at least act as if they believed—that God approved of such a thing? The pangs of conscience that overtook many of the murderers in the aftermath of the massacre—where were these pangs in the days, hours, and minutes leading up to the atrocity?

Later, some secretly confessed to a select few that before the murders, they struggled with their consciences—their personal, internal sense of right and wrong. In the end, however, they silenced or ignored that inner voice and chose to follow the steady stream of outer voices: sermons of grievance ringing from pulpits, self-assured Church leaders issuing commands from on high, fervent calls for unquestioned unity and obedience, the presentation of scripture as the Word of God, directives to close one's eyes, ears, and mind and simply believe and obey. These disparate voices came together in perfect harmony to create one diabolical refrain:

*Look without, not within...*

*Trust what is outside of you, not what is within you...*

*Stop thinking for yourself; let superior minds do the thinking...*

*You are lost; follow another because he knows the way...*

*Your feelings can't be trusted; adapt to the emotional temperature of the room...*

*Ignore what you know; you don't have the complete picture...*

*Doubt your doubts, and just believe...*

*Don't think, just do; don't criticize, just obey...*

*Ignore what you see before you because someone else can see around corners...  
God is inaccessible to you personally; look to a leader, an organization, or a book.*

The Mountain Meadows Massacre was just one in the long line of inhumane atrocities that have bedeviled the human race since the time we humans became capable of thinking in terms of life and death, good and bad, right and wrong. Our shared natural capacity to think in those terms ignited what we have traditionally called our conscience. All inhumane acts are the result of individuals numbing, silencing, ignoring, or failing to give due consideration to their conscience. All forms of tyranny begin as campaigns against the conscience of the individual—the subtle manipulation or blatant demand that a person ignore their inner voice—the voice that says, "This doesn't feel right, this doesn't make sense."

Yet, according to the Mormon understanding of Genesis's opening chapters, this inner voice was awakened when Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This inner voice—the aspect of human consciousness that is aware of time, life, and death, and thus is capable of judging things as being either good or bad, true or false—is so obviously an attribute of the Gods that in Genesis 3:24, the LORD God says of Adam and Eve, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good from evil."

By progressively deepening our understanding of what is good and bad, right and wrong—and learning by degrees to live according to that deepening understanding, we grow into more humane and, thus, Godlier individuals. This is why we were born, and each of us has within ourselves everything that we need to fulfill that purpose.

Unfortunately, religions have too often persuaded people that they lack the ability to determine what is right and wrong on their own. They teach a perverted understanding of human nature, pointing to our natural limitations, our failures to live up to ideals, and our sins and shortcomings as proof that we cannot trust ourselves or human reasoning.

However, the view presented in the Hebrew scriptures is that God confidently engages with humans rationally. Isaiah 1:18 reads:

*"Come now, let us reason together ... Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be like wool."*

Moroni 7:15-16 declares,

"It is given unto [us] to judge, that [we] may know good from evil...with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night. For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to [everyone], that [they] may know good from evil..."

Religions often point to things outside of ourselves as guides that should supersede our conscience: things such as long-held traditions, the consensus of the community, leaders whom they claim possess Divine knowledge and keys that God has not given to us, or scripture that they claim is the infallible "Word of God."

But the Word of God is not a book. Nowhere does the Bible declare itself to be "The Word of God." Instead, Hebrews 4:12 reads,

*"The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing so deep as to separate soul and spirit."*

Hebrew scripture describes the Word of God as a living and active voice that spoke to Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 20:9, Jeremiah himself describes the Word of God as being "in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones."

The Word of God is what Elijah heard after the fire, earthquakes, and whirlwind—what we traditionally call "the still small voice," but what a more faithful translation of the Hebrew would describe as "a sound of sheer silence."

III Nephi 11:3 describes this voice as being neither "harsh" nor "loud" but a "small" voice that can "pierce" one "to the very soul" and "cause [the] heart to burn."

II Nephi 29 and 31 teaches that God speaks to all nations, commanding them to write, giving "light unto the understanding," and speaking to them "according to their language, unto their understanding."

But, human understanding is influenced by culture and even by one's personal preferences. So it is that "The Book of Mormon's" author says in I Nephi 19:6-7:

*"I do not write anything...save it be that I think it be sacred...if I do err, even did they err of old; not that I would excuse myself because of other men, but because of the weakness which is in me...the things which some men esteem to be of great worth, both to the body and soul, others set at naught and trample under their feet."*

This is why Reform Mormonism holds that all scripture is art. It may be inspired and inspiring, comforting or challenging, a product of a specific time, place, and culture, yet capable of conveying timeless, universal insights. But in the end, one's scriptures cannot replace one's conscience.

As Parley P. Pratt wrote in 1840 in a statement now found in The Reform Mormon edition of Doctrine & Covenants,

*"It is not then to a book, however true or sacred or useful it may be, that we would point to as the fountain of knowledge; but rather to the great fountain of Light and truth enthroned in the midst of the heavens; the revealer of secrets and the author of all truth in existence, whether written or not. Knowledge from this source can only be derived by means of direct revelation." (Doctrine 2:11-12)*

The Word of God, to which we should look as a guide for conscience, is, by its nature, enwrapped in our conscience. As is taught in Doctrine & Covenants:

*"...You shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God. For the word of the Lord is truth, and whatsoever is truth is light, and whatsoever is Light is*

*Spirit, even the Spirit of Jesus Christ. And the Spirit giveth light to every [person] that cometh into the world; and the Spirit enlighteneth every [person] through the world, that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit. And every [person] that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Father. And the Father teacheth him of the covenant which he has renewed and confirmed upon you...not for your sakes only, but for the sake of the whole world." (Covenants 30:2-8)*

*"And the Light which shines, which gives you Light, is through him who enlightens your eyes, which is the same Light that quickens your understandings; Which Light proceeds forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space—The Light which is in all things, which gives life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God... The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not; nevertheless, the day shall come when you shall comprehend even God, being quickened in him and by him. Then shall ye know that ye have seen me, that I am, and that I am the true Light that is in you, and that you are in me..." (Covenants 40: 11-13, 49-50)*

*"All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself...otherwise, there is no existence. Behold, here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man; because that which was from the beginning is plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the Light." (Covenants 41:30-31)*

The Light to which we must look, the Light which we should receive, is by nature within each of us. This inner Light is "the law" that should govern all aspects of our lives. This Light is "the power of God" within us—a God who has declared, "This is my work and glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." This is a God whose highest value is Human life. This is the God of Heaven described in the Prophecy of Enoch who weeps when He looks on the earth and sees that human beings, rather than loving one another, "are without affection" and "hate their own blood."

The Prophecy of Enoch also teaches that the personal connection that every human being has to this God is an internal spiritual reality:

*"Therefore, it is given to abide in you the record of heaven, the Comforter, the keys of the kingdom of heaven, the truth of all things, that which quickeneth all things, which maketh alive all things, that which knoweth all things, and hath all power according to wisdom, mercy, truth, justice, and judgment." (Prophecy of Enoch 1:29)*

John Taylor once famously declared that "the day is coming when no one will be able to live on borrowed light," but the fact of the matter is it has always been that day. In the end, each of us will stand or fall, progress or regress, grow or not grow, depending on whether we were true to the Light that we have each received. No person can reveal that Light to another; no one else can serve as our conscience.

In our daily lives, in our relationships, in all of our studies and reading, in all of our endeavors, may we always—when all else is said and done—learn to be still and to the still small voice of conscience, the whispering of the Spirit, the Light of Christ at work within each of us. I leave these things with you in the Name of Christ, Amen.



# “My Coming out story: Reclaiming my Life” by John Crane

[April 6th, 2025. First Reform Mormon General Conference](#)

My coming out story is a long one. It doesn't end until I met the love of my life, and all the pieces started to fit together.

Ever since I can remember I had been fascinated by girls. All through kindergarten and early grade school, I always had a couple of girlfriends. My first and only fight was when I punched out a kid for making a pass at my girlfriend in the third grade. When she transferred to another school, I was devastated. But all that changed when puberty hit. I changed my attention to boys. I remember going on campouts and Aaronic Priesthood events and forcing myself not to look. I would go to the store and see a guy and get a crush on him, hoping that he would also fantasize about me. But, what did I fantasize about? I knew nothing about sex. I was very sheltered. All I could think about was just being around him. Other than just being there, I had no idea what I might do.

These fantasies persisted for several years. I tried to suppress them, but they kept coming back to haunt me. I thought I was going crazy. I thought this wasn't happening to anybody else but me. This was the late 50's and early 60's, and this was something you just didn't talk about, or even ask about. I saw pictures in the paper of guys in drag or outrageous clothing, protesting or getting arrested, and I felt that this wasn't who I was, but I didn't know what I was. The boys in high school were always bragging: “I went to a movie, and some queer touched my leg, and I beat the sh\*t out of him”. I didn't know where to turn for information. There was nobody I could talk to or confide in. I wanted to talk to my parents about it, but I was afraid. We never discussed sex of any kind in the family. I wanted to read something, but all the good books in the library were behind the librarian's desk, and there were no Walden Book Stores in the mall with their “Gay Studies” section.

I went on a mission to Sweden. Back on those days, few of the apartments where we lived had showers or hot water, so we would go to the public baths each week. Again, I was tempted, and I promised myself I wouldn't look. But we actually met an investigator in the sauna. We told the mission president about him. The president told us to ask him if he was gay, and if so, we should not teach him. The president said, “Gays feel the Spirit and are attracted to us, but we can't teach them.” I thought about Peter when he saw the Holy Ghost fall upon the Gentiles, so he taught and baptized them, so why not gays as well? But we asked this brother whether he was gay, and he said “No.” Eventually, he moved away, met a couple other elders, got baptized, and rode his bike a hundred miles to tell my companion that he joined the church.

After my mission, I got married, and had four children, all the while fighting these feelings inside of me. It took me thirteen years of marriage to realize that I actually was gay, and I needed to choose what to do about it. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was going through the classic stages of the “theoretical model of homosexual identity formation” articulated by psychologist Vivienne Cass in 1979. (This came only a few years after the APA declared that homosexuality was not a mental disorder.) I am grateful to Dr. Michael Adam Ferguson for pointing these out in a Facebook post. These are the stages:

1. Identity confusion
2. Identity comparison
3. Identity tolerance
4. Identity acceptance
5. Pride
6. Identity synthesis

At that stage of my life I was someplace between confusion and comparison. I needed information. I have always been a spiritual person, and had a very strong relationship with God, so I didn't want to do anything to jeopardize that relationship, but I also wanted to do what was right for me. I started reading and I also went to the bars and the baths to meet gay men, and talk with them. I heard their stories, and discovered that we had a lot in common. They weren't sleazy society misfits, but strong, intelligent, resourceful, talented, spiritual, and upstanding members of the community. I will never forget attending a concert of the Seattle Men's Chorus. I love and appreciate music, and I know what it takes to be a singer or musician. I realized that if these guys could be talented and accomplished and gay, then why not me? This was a great process of discovery for me. For being a shy loner, I found that I could actually relate to these men. And for spending most of my life living inside a cloud of anger and distrust, I discovered that I actually liked people, and they liked me. I also discovered how desperately they needed love, and found out how much I desperately needed to give love.

This is an amazing discovery for a person at age 36 to make. Another amazing discovery for me was the ability to make my own decisions and take responsibility for them. This idea completely changed my life. After all these changes and insights, I felt like the Ugly Duckling who realized he really was a swan.

I also realized that if I let it, this would take over my entire life, my time, and my attention. I realized that I had to re-invent parts of myself because, at the same time, the rest of my life was still there and waiting, and I had other goals to fulfill. When I used the term "identity" in connection with these six points, I only mean PART of my identity. The rest of me was still very much intact. I had fought hard to educate myself and develop a career, and to develop a knowledge of the Gospel and a relationship with Christ, and I wanted nothing to interfere with that. Of course, I believed at first that I could "pray away the Gay", but I soon realized that this wasn't going to change me. I was very active in the church, went on a mission, went to BYU, married in the temple, paid my tithing, read the scriptures regularly, and stayed super faithful. All to no avail. And I did none of it out of a sense of duty. I did it because I loved the Gospel, and it made me happy to live it. I had some wonderful teachers in the church as a youth, and at BYU. I paid attention and learned the Gospel. I had to play a lot of catchup because my family was part member, and not very active, and most of my friends were from old families in the Church, and they knew their stuff. But I got very interested, drove myself to study, and basically converted myself to the Gospel.

Eventually I moved out of the house, my wife filed for divorce, and I was excommunicated from the church. I learned that my excommunication trial was far different than most. I really dressed up for my trial and approached the whole thing with the utmost respect and dignity. No screaming. No fighting. No recriminations. No pleading. I had made my peace with God and was determined to take whatever I had coming. I even reached the point in my own mind, and I think we all must do this, where I was even ready to defy God, if necessary. At the trial, I felt a lot of love and concern from the brethren. Even the man who was supposed to testify against me cried and pleaded that I was a good man, and should not be excommunicated. The Spirit told them all that they should not do it, but in the end, the handbook won, and the Spirit lost.

I was out of the church, but I was surprised that I didn't feel too badly about it. My relationship was with God, not the church. I still had the Spirit, and I felt the assurance and the will to make it and to fight my way back, whatever "back" meant.

But, just to do a little reality check on myself, I thought about these words from Mosiah and asked myself how they applied to me:

2:37. I say unto you, that the man that doeth this, the same cometh out in open rebellion against God; therefore he listeth to obey the evil spirit, and becometh an enemy to all righteousness; therefore, the Lord has no place in him, for he dwelleth not in unholy temples.

2:38. Therefore if that man repenteth not, and remaineth and dieth an enemy to God, the demands of divine justice do awaken his immortal soul to a lively sense of his own guilt, which doth cause him to shrink from the presence of the Lord, and doth fill his breast with guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever.

2:39. And now I say unto you, that mercy hath no claim on that man; therefore, his final doom is to endure a never-ending torment.

I didn't really know at this time how God felt about any of this, but I was prepared to stand before Him and not shrink from His presence, but instead say: "This is my choice. I know it's right for me. If you don't like it, then send me away, and I will take whatever punishment you see fit to give me." Now remember, this was before I ever sought the mind and will of God of this matter. But I had made a choice, and I made that startling realization that for the first time in my life, I made a choice on my own behalf, and not to please somebody else.

I later realized that God never left me, and I felt like I could confidently walk into His Presence, and he would welcome me. I did not think myself an enemy to God. In fact, I always saw God as my Friend, and He still was. I just needed a space to step back and rethink our relationship, and make sure it was built on rock, not sand. He gave me that space. This was really a test for me to see whether I was willing to take a leap of faith, out into the darkness, not seeing the road ahead. The song "Runner" by Twila Paris says is best, and it was my inspiration during this time.

Runner when the road is long  
Feel like giving in, but you're hanging on

Oh runner, when the race is won  
You will run into His arms.

I was still searching and trying to determine if this was the right thing to do for me. I was in the Tolerance stage, working on Acceptance. One summer, I decided to drive alone down from Seattle, where my family was living, to San Francisco to check out things for myself. This was the height of the 80's and being gay in San Francisco was like being Irish on St. Patrick's Day. It was the thing to be, even if you weren't gay or Irish. I saw gay restaurants. I saw gay bars with big picture windows open to the street. I saw people who were gay who were friends all through high school, and were now young adults who never had to go through the indecision and turmoil I was now going through. I saw a couple walking down the street together, happy and carefree like a couple of children. When I saw that picture, things started to jell in my mind. I wanted to have a companion and to have us both feel like that. This was a long way from just a teenage crush years before. Then, the words to this popular song from back then, "The Voice" by Moody Blues came over the car radio:

Cause out on the ocean of life my love.  
There a so many storms we must rise above.  
Can you hear the spirit calling, as it's carried across the waves?  
You're already falling; it's calling you back to face the music.  
And the song that is coming through.  
You're already falling; the one that it's calling is you.

Make a promise take a vow.  
And trust your feelings it's easy now.  
Understand the Voice within.  
And feel a change already beginning.

This was it. I needed to learn to know myself. I needed to face the music. I needed to listen to the inner Voice. Instead of denying my feelings, I needed to listen to them.

Then, on the way back home, I stopped at a gay bar in Seattle. It was July 4th weekend. On a blackboard, on the wall, somebody had drawn a picture of the American flag and the words: "Gay, Proud, and American". That clinched it. I could honestly say I was all the above. Stage Six done. Stage Seven to come. My makeover was nearly complete. I was living a new life. I was experimenting, and is the case with experimentation, there are break throughs and there are mistakes. I had lived in a relationship with several people in Seattle, moved to San Francisco and got a job in Silicon Valley, and was now living in Los Angeles.

"Make a promise take a vow." God wants to know that you will listen to him and covenant to follow him no matter where the road may lead. A crisis is not just that something bad happens to you. A crisis is when circumstances force you to come to a point in life where a decision must be made. I reached that point in April 1985.

This was a real down point in my life. I had just been robbed; a relationship had failed miserably; and I had just broken my wrist. To make matter worse, I sensed that something illegal was going on at work. I remember laying on my bed and praying to God. I basically said:

I have made such a mess of my life trying to do things on my own, and living my life for myself. From now on, I am going to dedicate my life to you and your service. I'm not asking you to take over my life and make decisions for me, but I, here and now, make a covenant to dedicate my life to your service. I'll go where you want me to go. I'll say what you want me to say. I'll do what you want me to do. I'll be what you want me to be. I'll see what you want me to see.

Asking nothing in return, and not expecting any special favors, I needed a new focus in life. I opened myself up and made myself completely vulnerable and pliable in the Lord's hands, come what may. I was ready to make that kind of commitment. I am not the kind of person to take a promise lightly. My boss once said: "Once, you make a promise, you will move heaven and earth to keep that promise." Yes, I will. It's a matter of personal pride. I wouldn't be the person I am if I did any less. A general authority once said in Conference: "It is better to be trusted than to be loved." I always wanted to be the kind of person that people could trust.

Then, in the coming months, things started unfolding. I got laid off from work because I was complaining too much. I later found out that I was working, not for a software company, but a giant international money laundering operation. I got out just in time. They gave me a very generous severance and sent me on my way. Immediately, I was contacted by another former employee who wanted to go into business developing software. We had a fairly successful business creating what is now called GPS software, like Garmin and Tom Tom. We were one of the early pioneers in the business. With our product, you could use a touch screen to get detailed driving directions from any address in the US or Canada to any other address or point of interest. We later went out of business and sold the company, but we had a good run while it lasted.

I was also receiving a great deal of inspiration and spiritual guidance. I wanted my wrist to heal up, and once, while attending a prayer service at one of the local gay churches, I was standing in a circle, praying for a healing for my wrist. I felt a surge of the Spirit in my wrist, a sense of warmth and high vibration, and I heard my bones literally go "crack" and "crunch". And I knew my wrist had been healed, and I praised God. I visited my orthopedic surgeon for a follow-up visit a week later, and he said it was completely healed, and then proceeded to congratulate himself and tell me what a great doctor he was. I'm sure he was a great doctor, but there were other forces at work here, as well. I trusted the Lord and followed Him wherever that path led me.

I joined the local LA Affirmation chapter. Being a stranger in town, I met some friends in Affirmation and read some excellent pamphlets that Affirmation put out. One was about excommunication, which the pamphlet explained, doesn't mean the end of the world. You still have a life and God still loves you. That was a great comfort and source of information to me. In Affirmation I met a couple of men who were thinking of starting a study group and meeting to

study the Gospel and partake of the Sacrament together in each other's homes. I thought this might be a good idea, but I wanted to pray about it, so I did.

This is how my prayer was answered. One day I was sitting alone in a gay restaurant in West Hollywood, sipping a beer and checking out a guy as he walked across the room. Suddenly, the Spirit came over me and confirmed that I should take part with this group. But, think about it! God was sending me a message in the most vivid way possible. According to traditional church teachings, I was in the wrong place, drinking the wrong beverage, and thinking the wrong thoughts. But the Holy Ghost cut through all that clutter and told me what was really important. All the trivial do's and don't's are not important in the eyes of God. What God is looking for are people who trust Him and obey His voice.

We began meeting as a little group, then suddenly, several of us began receiving revelation, just like Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery did in the early days of the church. What's it like to receive a revelation? First you sense something like a point of tension building and building in your spirit. It's like a dam ready to burst. Then, are you instantly receive a huge block of understanding, all in an instant. You feel like a piece of knowledge or intelligence is about to flood over you. Joseph Smith aptly described it as pure intelligence flowing through you. Another teacher described it as "the flashing forth of intuition."

You want to write it all down. You want to write while in the Spirit as Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon did while receiving the Vision of the Three Degrees of Glory. During that time, you struggle to get your multi-dimensional holographic image down in a one-dimensional stream of words. You struggle to find the right word, or sometime the correct words just come to you. But some things simply can't be written. Either you feel it is not appropriate to write, or you have no frame of reference with which to relate it to others. (This is why it takes revelation of your own to understand revelation coming through others.)

While in the Spirit like this, you feel like you could ask God any question and get an answer. You feel like God knows what you are going to ask even ever before you ask it. Unfortunately, the vision eventually closes, though you wish it would last forever. I use the word "feel", which is a word normally associated with emotion. But, this it not emotion. It is intuition.

I learned in the little study group that evolved into a church that we are all entitled to revelation and the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, concerning our callings and stewardship, regardless if the stewardship is our own life, our family, our church callings, our job, or even a venture such as we felt called to embark upon.

In all the revelations given to our group, God begins them by conveying his great love for us. This is something we all need to hear, and especially the gay community. Yeah, He really does love all of us a lot, and that is probably the scariest thing about God and the hardest thing to handle. His love. Stop thinking you don't deserve it, because if you think that, all you do is cut yourself off from Him. It's not God cutting you off from him; it's because you are cutting yourself off from God.

Not content with taking anybody else's word for it, and realizing that everybody had presumed to know how God felt about homosexuality, but never bothered to ask. I decided to ask. To give you a quick summary of what I received, I learned that when it comes to sexual relations, God is no respecter of persons. The same rules about adultery and fornication apply to everybody, regardless of sexual orientation. To God, it is irrelevant and immaterial whether the couple is same-sex or opposite-sex. He loves all of us. Not especially because you are gay, or especially because you are straight. It's all irrelevant. We're all special in our own way, but nobody is any more special than anybody else. I talk a lot about dreams and revelations, but does that make me special? No. I figure God will talk to anybody who has faith, sets aside his fears and prejudices, and really listens.

I found out that cheating is cheating. Gay or straight makes no difference. Sex is deep and intimate communication that takes place on many levels, and it can destroy a couple or friendship, or it can create a bond that must be preserved in a relationship that is secured by a deep interpersonal covenant, made in connection with the Holy Ghost.

It's OK to have a same-sex relationship. In fact, the Lord specifically recommended that you form relationships. But you must be responsible; you must make sacred covenants with Him and with each other; and you must live by them. Back then, nobody dared dream that same-sex marriage would eventually be legal, and if the Lord knew it was going to happen, he never told me. But, the thing about revelation is you only get to see the path a few steps ahead of you. If you aren't ready for the full picture, you don't see the full picture. But, the two things that came across to me as being of paramount importance were (1) Follow the Spirit, and (2) Make and keep covenants.

With this new knowledge, I changed my behavior immediately. I had been running around, so to speak, but I received the personal message, in no uncertain terms, that this was wrong.

We collected all the revelations we received, except the ones that were too personal, and put them together in a book. Unlike most books that come out today, purporting to be scripture, this was not some warmed-over ancient translation or sealed portion. This was a modern-day testament, given in the 80's, that God has not forgotten us, and we are equally loved along with everybody else.

In my personal life, I longed for the spiritual companionship of the Lord, but I also longed for the physical and emotional contact with somebody I could, as Joseph Smith put it, "it is pleasing for friends to lie down together, locked in the arms of love, to sleep and wake in each other's embrace and renew their conversation." (Yes, he actually said that, but he was specifically referring to the resurrection.) But to be able to experience this with a choice companion is what I wanted with all my heart.

A couple of months later, I received a revelation that God had somebody especially prepared for me to come into my life. He would be somebody I never considered or expected, but he would come into my life and we would be a blessing to each other. It also stated that being together would be "the key to your success". I waited.

Things were not going too well for our little group, and I was on the verge of leaving. We began in August 1985, and it was now October 1986. We had a great beginning with a wonderful Spirit in attendance, but over the months, egos started to get in the way. Now, we were going to have a missionary meeting on a Saturday, but I wasn't sure if I was going to participate or ever return to the organization again.

All that week before the meeting, I had a different dream each night. I dreamt about missing a plane. Then I dreamt about missing an elevator. Finally, on the Friday night before, I dreamt about missing the proverbial boat. I took them all as warning messages and decided to attend the Saturday meeting. Just as I showed up and began to walk up the sidewalk to the porch of the private home where we were to meet, Thom, who was at the meeting, decided to come out on the porch to get a breath of fresh air. He saw me coming, and he said time stood still for him. I came up and gave him a hug, the same as I would do for anybody in the group. But, this time, I especially wanted him to feel all the love of God in that hug. Later on, he says that he felt it was God hugging him, and he never felt safer in anybody's arms.

Throughout the meeting, we kept looking across the room at each other. It was getting embarrassing because other people started to notice, and I tried not to look at the most beautiful face I have ever seen in my life. But I realized later that looks were irrelevant. I finally met a person who understood me, and that's not easy to do. We can also totally be ourselves around each other, and a person like that is hard to find.

Thom had been staying with some church members all that week, but nobody told him about me and nobody told me about him. It was literally love at first sight. The song "Some Enchanted Evening you may see a stranger across a crowded room" doesn't do justice to how we both felt. In fact, all the love songs started making sense to me. It turns out he was the son of a Mormon bishop. He had been staying in town with church members for a couple of weeks. He had to leave Sacramento and had a choice of either going to San Francisco or Los Angeles. He didn't like either choice, but for some reason he chose Los Angeles. I knew somebody was coming down from Sacramento to Los Angeles and needed money for a bus ticket. I donated the money, but I didn't know who the money was for, and he didn't know that I donated the money. It wasn't until years later that we realized that I paid for his ticket, and made it possible for us to meet.

Like me, he also had a very tough birth, but unlike me, he was born premature. He was handicapped with cerebral palsy. It only affected how he walked. He was so intelligent he got accepted into Stanford right out of high school, and so good looking that a model agency wanted him to come work for them. But he gave all that up and more to serve a mission because he wanted to please an ungrateful and abusive father. He never told me all at once about his life before we met, but he has gradually unfolded it for me over the years, confiding in me things he has never told anybody else. I don't mind not knowing everything, but, I don't think he could tell me anything that would not make me love him, and if I were to tell only part of his life, you would be amazed, and it would also break your heart,

I still wonder whether you can tell at an early age whether children are gay, but I have seen early pictures of Thom. I didn't have any trouble picking him out from his brothers and sisters.



He was the brightest, the happiest, with the biggest smile, and had a certain sparkle about him. I wanted to know him, even as a child.

We moved in together as soon as we could find a place. But, before that, I didn't want him to feel stuck in any situation and not able to get out of it, so on our first date, I went to the ATM and gave him some money right on the spot. No questions asked. When we moved in, we decided not to have sex until we held a commitment ceremony at the church. It was difficult holding off about three weeks, but we made it. Nobody believed us, but we made it.

Not even waiting to move the furniture into our new apartment, we slept the first night together on the floor. We each had the same dream. I dreamt that we were sitting beside each other, and a man sat across from us at a desk or table. He was showing us a big photo album of our future life together, slowly turning page by page. Next morning, I told Thom about the dream, and he said he had the exact same dream.

As the years went by, we found we had a lot in common. He was physically, but not mentally, handicapped. I was visually handicapped. From the moment I met him, I just knew exactly how he wanted to be treated. No sympathy. No coddling. No special treatment. If he falls down, he doesn't want any help getting up. When we haul in the groceries, he always picks the heaviest load. He used to wear leg braces, but he threw out his braces shortly after we got together and doesn't need them anymore. I call that a miracle.

Once, when I was praying at bedtime, I heard a distinct voice saying: "The key to your success is that you both remain together." I know this is right, and that God wants us to remain together, and both of our lives have changed in a very significant way after we got together. I had actually forgotten that the Lord had said that to me earlier before we even met. He was just reminding me what he said earlier.

When I was a little kid, my mom used to take me to the children's hospital to see the eye doctor. I remembered seeing the little crippled kids at the children's hospital and always included in my childhood evening prayer to "bless the poor little crippled boys and girls". Without knowing or realizing it, I was praying for him.

We have been together 38 years, married 12 years. Before marriage was legal, we saw a group of gay and Lesbian attorneys here in town to draw up our wills and powers of attorney. I am not generally an emotional person, so I didn't realize what an impact drawing up a will together would have on me emotionally. To finally meet people out in the business world who understood us and our concerns exactly, and the fact that we were making our mark together, out in the external world made me suppress a tear or two. Now that we are married, I never feel more married than when we file our taxes together. We have both our parents' marriage certificates hanging on the wall, and our own hanging on the wall in the foyer. It's the first thing you see when you walk in the front door.

Both of us are excommunicated. Neither of us has plans to ever return. Thom refuses to attend, but I will visit occasionally, when a family member is getting blessed or baptized. Some of our families accept us, while others don't. Many accepted us as a couple until we got married. So

long as our relationship was abstract, it was OK with them. But, when our relationship became real and tangible by legal recognition, they couldn't handle it. But on the bright side, we have had members of both families tell us "We have never seen you happier." We have also been told by couples in both families that we are the inspiration and example for their straight marriage. And when my brothers' wives get together at a reunion, they always ask Thom "How can we get our husbands to treat us the way John treats you?"

My Patriarchal Blessing talks about "the greatest blessing that will come into your life ...[being]... your companion forever". He truly is the greatest blessing that has come into my life. All the trials and pains and uncertainty were worth it. I feel like King Aragorn in "Lord of the Rings", who, after his long trials and labors, finally married the person he loved. And, for me, this is a testimony that God loves us; He is always mindful of us; and when we listen, and when we covenant to obey Him, he hears and answers prayer. In the Name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

# “All the Voices of the Restoration” by Steve Pynakker

[April 6th, 2025, First Reform Mormon General Conference](#)

Well hello there! This is your Evangelical fanboy of the all things Restoration, and I want to thank the Reformed Mormonism movement for allowing me to just say a few words here briefly for your first General Conference and first of hopefully many.

I've just kind of been reflecting on what does it mean um to be "a fanboy of the Restoration?" but more importantly what the work that the Mormon Book Reviews channel has been doing is listening to all the voices of the Restoration, so I'm going to title this "All the Voices of the Restoration".

As I peruse my most recent edition of the Book of Mormon that I just received - this hasn't been published yet, it's about ready to be. It's the very first, world's first almost-indestructible waterproof Book of Mormon. Matter of fact, you can't even tear the pages.

Then I go through and I look at different expressions of the Restoration and their Books of Mormon - including the Church of Jesus Christ, which I'll get to shortly. Then of course another expression of the Restoration: The Chronicles of the Children of Araneck by prophet, seer, and revelator Matthew Gill in England.

Then I get to hear even outsiders' expressions and voices through a book such as "A Pentecostal reads the Book of Mormon: A literary and Theological Introduction" by Christopher Thomas, who's one of the leading Pentecostal theologians in the world. He was also the founding president of the Book of Mormon Studies Association, and that's been doing a very important work. So there's also this interfaith um aspect that's going on.

There is a lot of really new cool expressions that are happening now in the information age - the age of the internet - and there's just a lot of people talking to each other that in the past weren't. I really feel part of it was that I was called to enter into this space to facilitate dialogue between all the different branches of the Restoration, but then also extend it out to all other groups within the Restoration.

That's why I think Reform Mormonism is a really important expression in the Restoration, because it deals with people who often are on the fringes; the people who maybe are not accepted by some of the mainstream churches, but are believers in the Restoration, are believers in the doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and in the Restoration as a whole. Maybe its because they're Queer, or they're trans, or any number of reasons why they don't feel welcome in other branches of the Restoration. This movement's been around for a couple decades, or a few decades now I believe, but now it's kind of organizing in such a way that you're having a General Conference and allowing all those other voices to come and be heard, including mine.

Actually, Evan Sharley, who's one of the facilitators of this group, reminded me - probably about a year ago or so - she said "Steve, you ARE part of the Restoration". I never thought of it that way but that really hit me, that in one sense I'm as much of a product of the Book of Mormon

and Joseph Smith as I owe a lot of my identity to him as much as a person who's a member in the Restoration. That really struck me, and I just really want to commend the work that Rob and Evan are doing. These are two important people who've been on my show multiple times, and just to see the evolution of this movement and including me. I even encouraged Evan to maybe engage this group and then eventually she got involved after departing from Community of Christ, and then of course we've been able to document that journey in this space as well, which I think is a really important journey and an important voice and that's what we try to do here.

Now I do get push back for having certain people on, and it comes it's bipartisan. There are people on the right and people on the left that say "Why in the world are you having this person on?? Why are you platforming them??" My thing is that even people who are controversial often do represent the views of millions of people, so you just can't ignore these these individuals and what they have to say, but also more importantly is that what we try to do here is try to model how dialogue can be done in such a way in which you can have people from two disparit camps that are antagonistic to each other and find ways to build bridges and bring people together. One of the first things that God showed me when I first started this channel was He went to me, put me in a place where on one side of the street I'm on with my people holding up signs and across the street there was another group of people holding up signs in opposition to my group, and God said "See those people across the street?" and I said "Yeah", and He said "Just remind yourself those are fellow image bearers." Fellow image bearers.

So I even have people on this program that I wildly disagree with - and in some cases may not even personally like them too much - but I think that their voices are very, very important. Those are kind of the founding principles of this whole thing: just to listen to all the voices recognize that we all, all, all are image bearers, and also recognize that Jesus hung out with the with the people on the fringes; the destitute, the prostitutes, and even the tax collectors. Oh my goodness! The point being is that He loved people where they were at and wasn't afraid to affiliate with them, and I think that's the most important thing, and also to take on the religious establishment that is judgmental towards people and is very much about "in-group, out-group" thinking. Jesus went into their Temple - in His own Temple - and turned over the tables.

As Dr. Kyle Beshears - a fellow Evangelical who is also a highly regarded scholar in the Mormon space - said once on Gospel Tangents: he said "Jesus didn't go into Samaria and turn over the tables in their Temple; He went and did it in the Temple in Jerusalem." The point being is that a lot of this antagonism that Evangelicals have directed towards the Restoration is not really biblical. We need to, rather than focus on the speck in your eye, if you will, we should focus on this plank hanging out of ours in many ways.

I think it's more important that, in my sense, being part of the Evangelical community, to be a voice of not opposition, but maybe - and I don't even want to say prophetic voice - but just be a voice that's pushing back against the the current direction that it's heading in.

So I think these kinds of conversations can be very informative and I just want to thank Evan and Rob for all the work that they've been doing. I want to thank all the people who are going to be participating in this; many of you I know, I'm friends with, been in communication with, maybe

some of you have probably been on my program. I just want to let people know what we're doing here at Mormon Book Reviews is not to censor people, not to tell other people or cancel or whatever, but more "Let's just all talk to each other and try to find some commonality." In this time, in this country's period where we have so much division and so much strife and it's literally tearing our country apart, and who knows where this all goes, I think it's really important that we have communities that can model how it can be done. How we can come together even when we do strongly disagree with each other, and do it in a way that can show that Christ is operating in our lives and in our movements.

Again, if you don't see those fruits, I don't know if Christ is there. That's just my opinion. If you don't see striving towards communications, loving, turning the other cheek, loving your enemies, all these things - if you're not seeing these things and instead you're seeing "Attack! Attack! Attack! Attack! Attack! Attack! Attack! Attack!", you have to ask yourself "Is Jesus in the center of that individual's endeavor or that movement?", and I think that's really the most important thing.

The Reform Mormonism movement is radical. It's bold and audacious, but I think we need that. Many times it's the people on the fringes that often do push the conversation and push things in those directions. I always tell people "Always look at the fringes! Don't look at the center, look at the fringes and see what's going on" because eventually those fringes often can become very important movements. I'm hopeful that the Reform Mormonism expression will inform these conversations for the future and show that all the voices of the Restoration are included and people can contribute and it' be a beautiful thing.

So I want to thank again the organizers of the Reform Mormonism movement for allowing my voice to be heard today, and I really wish you well in this groundbreaking conference that's happening.

I also wanted to point out too that in addition to uh The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints having their General Conference, there are other expressions within the Restoration that are also having General Conferences, and one of the very first General Conferences that I will be attending will be April 11th in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, which is the headquarters of the world conference of the Church of Jesus Christ. Now, I think it's wonderful that the very first church of the Restorations' doors that I darkened was the Church of Jesus Christ, and I think it's really appropriate that the very first General Conference I attend would be the Church of Jesus Christ. So I want to thank my brothers and sisters in the Church of Jesus Christ for inviting me to attend their sacred space and their General Conference which is April 11th through the 13th, and I'm looking forward to engaging that lovely community and their wonderful people.

I also want to just thank the wonderful people in the Reform Mormon as a movement, and all the other expressions including Community of Christ which is having their World Conference in the first week of June; maybe we'll get to that I don't know. Really it's just important that this is the time of year when the various groups of the Restoration comes together, and maybe one day all of them will come together as one. Alright thank you so much everybody, and God bless!

# “The Importance of Music in Reform Mormonism” by Roman

[April 6th, 2025, First Reform Mormon General Conference](#)

## Greeting:

Hello, my name is Roman. I'm a 6th generation mormon.

## Introduction:

Friends in the Restoration, today I want to speak about the sacred and transformative power of music. Music is not just an art or a form of entertainment—it is a divine gift from our Heavenly Parents, a means of worship, and a source of spiritual enlightenment. Since the early days of the Restoration, music has uplifted and united us, and it continues to inspire us today as we seek to build a faith rooted in personal revelation, reason, and love.

## 1. Music as a Form of Worship

From the earliest revelations, we see that music holds a sacred place in our spiritual practice. In Doctrine and Covenants 25:12, we read:

*"For my soul delighteth in the song of the heart; yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads."*

This reminds us that music can be an act of prayer—one that transcends words and speaks directly to the Divine within us. Whether we are gathered in fellowship, singing in our homes, or reflecting in solitude, music has the power to lift our spirits and deepen our connection with the sacred. It is not limited to hymns or traditional religious music—any song that moves our hearts toward goodness, compassion, and wisdom can be an offering of worship.

## 2. Music Unites and Strengthens Us

Throughout history, people of faith have turned to music for strength in times of hardship and celebration. Early Latter Day Saints sang as they journeyed westward, finding hope in lyrics that reminded them of their resilience. One of their most well-known hymns, “Come, Come, Ye Saints”, carried the message:

*"All is well, all is well!"*

Today, music continues to unite us—not only within our congregations but in our broader communities. Whether through choirs, family singalongs, or the stirring harmonies of great musical traditions, music reminds us that we are never alone in our faith. Reform Mormonism celebrates the diversity of spiritual expression, and music is one of the most powerful ways to experience that unity in diversity.

## 3. Music as a Teacher of Truth and Inspiration

Music is one of the most effective ways to internalize deep truths, at least for me. While we may forget the exact words of a sermon, the melody and message of a song stay with us.

When we sing “I Am a Child of God”, we affirm the Divinity within each of us. When we listen to songs that speak of love, justice, and the beauty of creation, we are reminded of our responsibility to act with kindness and integrity. Reform Mormonism teaches - or can teach - that personal revelation is ongoing, and music often becomes a medium through which we receive inspiration and insight.

President Heber J. Grant once said:

*“The singing of our sacred hymns, written by the servants of God, has a powerful effect in converting people to the principles of the Gospel, and in promoting peace and spiritual growth.”*

*(Improvement Era, Sept. 1940, 522)*

In Reform Mormonism, we might expand this idea to say that music creates space for revelation in its many forms—whether we call it the Spirit, personal intuition, or simply the profound emotional resonance that leads us to greater understanding.

#### **4. Music in Our Daily Lives**

Music is not just for sacred gatherings—it can be a daily source of peace, reflection, and joy. Listening to uplifting or thought-provoking music can center us in times of stress. Singing can help us express emotions that words cannot fully capture. In both moments of sorrow and celebration, music can be our companion.

Reform Mormonism encourages us to embrace joy, learning, and individual spiritual practice, and music can be an essential part of that. Whether through hymns, classical compositions, folk ballads, or modern songs that inspire us, music can be a way to nurture our souls.

In my family, we have a tradition of talent shows and playing songs on pianos, guitars, ukuleles, and even a jug band. My grandmother was in the then-called Mormon Tabernacle Choir when I was younger. She has always encouraged everyone in my family to pursue any sort of musical talent and use it as a way to connect with others. My family has rough patches like any other family, but we have always connected through music.

#### **Conclusion:**

My dear friends in the Restoration, music is a profound and sacred gift. It strengthens our faith, unites us as a people, teaches truth, and opens our hearts to divine inspiration. Let us embrace its power—not just in worship, but in every aspect of our lives. Let us sing with joy, listen with intention, and allow music to deepen our journey of faith and understanding.

To conclude, let us reflect again on the words of scripture:

*“The song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads.”*

May we use music to express our love for truth, our devotion to growth, and our commitment to a faith that seeks wisdom, compassion, and joy. In the name of all that is good and holy, amen.

And let me close with an arrangement of "Brightly Beams".

Capo 2

C F

1 Brightly beams our Parent's mercy

D7 G7

From Their lighthouse evermore;

C F

But to us They give the keeping

C G7 C

Of the lights along the shore.

Refrain:

F C

Let the lower lights be burning!

D7 G7

Send a gleam across the wave!

C F

Some poor fainting, struggling sailor

C G7 C

You may rescue, you may save.

C F

2 Dark the night of sin has settled,

D7 G7



Loud the angry billows roar;

C F

Eager eyes are watching, longing,

C G7 C

For the lights along the shore. [Refrain]

Refrain:

F C

Let the lower lights be burning!

D7 G7

Send a gleam across the wave!

C F

Some poor fainting, struggling sailor

C G7 C

You may rescue, you may save.

C F

3 Trim your feeble lamp, dear neighbor!

D7 G7

Some poor sailor, tempest-tossed,

C F

Trying now to make the harbor,

C G7 C

In the darkness may be lost. [Refrain]

Refrain:

F C

Let the lower lights be burning!

D7 G7

Send a gleam across the wave!

C F

Some poor fainting, struggling sailor

C G7 C

You may rescue, you may save.

# “The Sacredness of the Transgender Experience” by Evan Sharley

[April 6th, 2025, First Reform Mormon General Conference](#)

## 1. Introduction

I have a niece who is deutan colorblind, meaning she can't see the color green and has trouble seeing the color red. Even when she and I are looking at the same things, we see them drastically differently because of our bodies - specifically our eyes. I don't see our difference as a deficiency, and in fact, I am fascinated at hearing how she experiences the world. She has a unique perspective, and while I will never experience it, I try to understand it. At family gatherings, I occasionally ask her about some of her experiences and have looked up some simulators online to see what things would look like if I were colorblind like her.

In this same way, transgender people, having quite unique experiences, have a unique perspective on life. As a transgender Mormon theologian, I feel I am in a position to articulate what value and insights transgender folks provide for the human family. While most of you listening will likely never experience being transgender, I pray that you will be curious about our differences and strive to learn from them.

## 2. Eternal Progression and the Fluidity of Gender

The doctrine of eternal progression means that we are eternal beings who will be constantly growing and changing for eternity. Yet, paradoxically, some claim that there are things that are entirely immune from change throughout eternity and thus are immune from progression. One of the common things that people latch onto is gender. As I examined yesterday, even our understanding of God has not been eternal and unchanging, so why would something like gender be immune from change? Within this life, some certainly have an unchanging sense of their gender identity. However, there are others whose eternal progression includes learning what their true gender identity is.

I am one of these people. I was told since birth that I was to be a man because of how my body looked. However, this ended up not being applicable to me because as I progressed, through studying and pondering, I found that I am, in fact, a woman. Part of this pondering was allowing myself to express masculinity alongside femininity and seeing how each felt. I came to find that I looked forward to the days when I would be expressing myself more femininely, and my masculine days increasingly made me feel uncomfortable. My enjoying femininity is called “gender euphoria,” and me having an aversion to expressing or being perceived as masculine is called “gender dysphoria.” This phenomenon has not been unexamined within our tradition: the book “Queer Mormon Theology” by Blaire Ostler suggests that the Spirit communicates through the body and uses feelings to confirm truths. In this way, gender dysphoria and euphoria could be seen as the Holy Ghost prompting people to recognize their identity.

Some assume that we must fit neatly within the gender binary, but creation itself urges us to reconsider. On the First Day of Creation the binaries of day and night were created, yet dawn

and dusk also came into existence. On the Third Day, land and sea were separated, yet marshes and beaches blur these distinctions. Likewise, on the Sixth Day of Creation the gender binary was established, and yet, like the other acts of creation, there are people who are not part of those initial binaries.

None of these are mistakes or exceptions; they are integral to the beauty of the earth. Each one may be understood to be a certain way at a particular time, but none are rigid, and all are fluid and able to change, for the very nature of reality is progression.

### **3. What Perspectives We Bring**

Transgender and non-binary people walk a sacred and holy path. Our lives offer unique insights into Divinity and humanity, revealing facets of the human experience that many cisgender individuals may never encounter or even consider.

For example, most people live their entire lives predominantly experiencing the effects of either estrogen or testosterone, unaware of how these hormones shape not only their bodies but also their minds and emotions. Transgender individuals who undergo Hormone Replacement Therapy, however, often experience life with both hormones in significant phases of their lives.

In my personal experience, when my body predominantly had testosterone, I struggled to cry. I would feel emotions deeply, but my body resisted the act of crying, leaving me frustrated and unable to access the relief that tears can bring. Many assumed my difficulty crying was due to social conditioning—that I had been taught to suppress my tears to appear “manly.” But that wasn’t entirely the case, because the physical influence of testosterone in my body played a big part in this. I recall a day several months after I began hormone replacement therapy when I had a tough day at work. I sought comfort from my wife, cried, and in a matter of minutes, I felt better - I remarked to her how much crying helped relieve my emotional state.

This experience taught me something profound: our emotions and their physical manifestations are influenced by our biology in ways we don’t always recognize. For me, having experienced both of these hormones, I am able to provide a valuable insight into the effects of these to my cisgender family and friends. For the men in my life, I can empathize more deeply with their experiences, because I once felt similarly constrained by testosterone’s effects. Likewise, I can help cisgender women better understand some of the emotional barriers that men may face, fostering more compassionate and meaningful conversations.

This dual perspective of having experienced life through the lens of both hormones has deepened my understanding of the human condition. It’s one of many ways that transgender people enrich humanity - we offer insights into the complexities of body, mind, and spirit.

### **4. Conclusion**

The prophet Moroni counseled us to “take heed... that ye do not judge that which... is good and of God to be of the devil.” Too often, difference is met with fear rather than curiosity. Fear of what is unfamiliar can lead to isolation, misunderstanding, and even violence. In the same chapter, Moroni taught us a good rule of thumb to know good from evil: “that which is of God

inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, everything which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God.”

When I speak with my niece about her colorblindness, I don't approach her experience as something broken or lesser—I approach it with curiosity, seeking to understand an experience that is different from mine. I may never see the world as she does, but by listening to her I gain new insights as to what it means to be human. Her colorblindness is neither a flaw nor a mistake—it simply offers a different way of experiencing the world that is good and godly.

In the same way, transgender and non-binary people experience the world through a lens that cisgender people do not. Our differences are not deficiencies; they are invitations—opportunities for you to see the richness and complexity of human existence in ways you may never have even considered. When you take the time to listen to our experiences, you are not just showing us kindness; you are gaining a deeper understanding of what it means to be human. Our trans-ness is good and godly.

In light of this, I would like to make a proclamation, and I encourage you to contact me at [ReformMormon@gmail.com](mailto:ReformMormon@gmail.com) so you can sign your own name to this proclamation:

We believe that gender, like all aspects of our eternal journey of progression, may also be a process of self-discovery. While some experience an unchanging sense of gender identity, others come to understand their true gender identity over time.

We believe that just as dawn and dusk exist between day and night, and marshes and beaches blur the boundaries of land and sea, so too does gender exist beyond a rigid binary. These variations are not mistakes or exceptions but integral to the Divine order, for all things are in motion, reflecting the eternal principle of progression.

We believe that experiences of Gender Euphoria and Gender Dysphoria are forms of Divine revelation, prompting individuals to recognize their gender identity. As we listen to these promptings, we come to understand more fully who we are meant to become.

We believe that those who transition genders gain unique perspectives. Their insights foster empathy, bridge divides between genders, and enrich conversations about the complexity of the human experience.

We believe that transgender and non-binary individuals should be welcomed, respected, and affirmed in all spaces - public and private - without fear of exclusion, discrimination, or violence. As the Prophet Moroni taught, all that invites love and goodness is divinely inspired. We reject fear-based judgment and seek to build a world where all people are seen, valued, and celebrated.

So, now that this proclamation is made, I ask you: Will you choose curiosity over fear? Will you, like I do with my niece, seek to understand perspectives different from your own? Will you join me in building communities where all - cisgender, transgender, and non-binary alike - are seen, valued, and embraced as part of God's Divine creation?

This sacred work has already begun. The path has been laid before us. I invite you to walk it with me - with open hearts, open minds, and an unwavering commitment to love, affirmation, and grace.

# “Closing Prayer” by Sarah Williams

[April 6th, 2025, First Reform Mormon General Conference](#)

Hello, I'm Sister Sarah Williams and on behalf of the entire Reform Mormon community, I have been asked to extend our sincere and heartfelt gratitude to all of the participants who have joined us here, both our speakers and attendees. It has been an honor and a blessing to share in this time of reflection, testimony, and reclaiming our faith with all of you.

This is a tradition that we are excited to continue our next general conference will be held in October and anyone who feels called to submit a talk can find all the information on how to do so at our website [ReformMormon.com](http://ReformMormon.com).

The work of seeking truth and deepening our faith doesn't end here though, and I hope that as we leave this General Conference we can continue to question, to study, and to uplift one another in the spirit of Reform.

Again, thank you to everyone who's participated, and if you would now join me in a closing prayer.

Our beloved Heavenly Parents, we come to you in the spirit of gratitude for the time we've been able to share here together, for the wisdom of those who have spoken, and for the spirit that has moved amongst us.

We ask that your presence remain among all of us who have gathered here, and that you guide us in strengthening our faith, guide us in our questions, and help us to ever walk the path of truth with courage and love.

As we depart from this gathering we ask that You will stay with us and help us to go forth and work ever to build a more loving, a more just, and a more holy world with the inspiration that You have given us and that we have here received.

We ask for these things, and any other blessings that you see fit to give us, in the name of Christ. Amen.

Thank you for joining us.