

Applying the Atonement to Sweeten the Bitter

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Tasting the bitter is a deliberate part of life

- Inside the bitterness box:
 - pain, guilt, embarrassment, lack of self esteem, sorrow, despair, anger, depression, misery, unhappiness, suffering
- Moses 6:55 (Lord to Adam)
"and they taste the bitter, that they may *know* to prize the good"
- D&C 29:39 (Lord to Adam)
" for if they never should have bitter they could not *know* the sweet"
- Neal Maxwell:
" It follows, then, that you and I cannot really expect to glide through life, coolly air-conditioned, while naively petitioning: "Lord, give me experience but not grief, a deeper appreciation of happiness but not deeper sorrow, joy in comfort but not in pain, more capacity to overcome but not more opposition; and please do not let me ever feel perplexed while on thine errand. Then let me come quickly and dwell with thee and fully share thy joy." ("If thou endure it well", pg 4)

Sources of bitterness in our lives

- Sin
 - One end of the spectrum
 - Our fault
- Adversity
 - Other end of the spectrum
 - no fault of our own
 - Natural causes (earthquake, weather)
 - Actions of someone else
 - Abuse, armed conflicts etc.
- Unwise choices, hasty judgments, mistakes, disappointments
 - In between ends of the spectrum
 - some degree of fault, sometimes no fault
- Bruce Hafen:
"At the "sin" end of the continuum, we bear grave responsibility, for we bring the bitter fruits of sin fully upon ourselves. But at the other end of the spectrum, marked by "adversity," we may bear no responsibility at all. The bitterness of adversity may come to us, as it did to Job in the Old Testament, regardless of our actual, conscious fault.... Bitterness may taste the same, whatever its source, and it can destroy our peace, break our hearts, and separate us from God." ("Beauty for Ashes: The Atonement of Jesus Christ," Ensign, Apr. 1990, pg 7)
- The bitterness cycle
 - We fall into the bitterness box due to tragedy
 - Because of the bitterness we feel, we cycle to the sin end of the spectrum

- Pride
- Not forgiving others (the “greater sin”)
- Angry and hateful thoughts toward others (not necessarily those who caused the bitterness in the first place)
- Resentment, anger toward God at the circumstances we find ourselves in
- Bitterness from sin reinforces (negatively) our original bitterness taking us back to the start of the cycle, spiraling downward and never getting out of the bitterness box

The Sweet box

- Inside the sweetness box:
 - sweet, joy, happiness, peace, hope, security, comfort, confidence

The Power to heal – “Beauty for ashes”

- Isaiah 53:4-5
 “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.
 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”
- Isaiah 61:1-3
 “he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;... to comfort all that mourn... to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness ”
- “Infinite Atonement”
 - One way the Atonement is “infinite” is it covers the whole spectrum of bitter, not just at the “our sin” end
 - Bruce Hafen (1st Quorum of 70):
 “The Savior’s atonement is thus portrayed as the healing power not only for sin, but also for carelessness, inadequacy, and all mortal bitterness. The Atonement is not just for sinners.” (Beauty for Ashes: The Atonement of Jesus Christ,” Ensign, Apr. 1990, pg 7.)
 - Robert Millet:
 “To put it simply, the Atonement does more than fix the mistakes. It does more than balance the scales. It even does more than forgive our sins. It rehabilitates regenerates, renews, and transforms human nature.” (“Grace Works”, pg 95)

- Boyd K Packer:
"So many are like the immigrant woman who skimmed and saved and deprived herself until, by selling all of her possessions, she bought a steerage-class ticket to America. She rationed out the meager provisions she was able to bring with her. Even so, they were gone early in the voyage. When others went for their meals, she stayed below deck—determined to suffer through it. Finally, on the last day, she must, she thought, afford one meal to give her strength for the journey yet ahead. When she asked what the meal would cost, she was told that all of the meals had been included in the price of her ticket." (Grace Works. pg 95)

How the Atonement “sweetens the bitter”

- **There is only one Atonement!**
 - We taste the bitter in life:
 - On one end of the spectrum through our own actions where we bear responsibility
 - On the other end of the spectrum through no fault of our own
 - The *measures* taken to apply the Atonement to remove the bitter from our lives are the *same* in all cases
 - In other words, the process of “casting our burden” at the Savior’s feet is the same regardless of how we obtained the burden
 - We call this process when we sin repentance meaning to “**turn away**”
 - While we “shy away” from the word repentance when the burden we receive is not of our own making, we still need to “turn away”
 - We can learn by looking at the measures we must take for applying the atonement for sin (Repentance) and applying it to the other end of the spectrum
 - Bruce Hafen:
"The Atonement can heal the effects of tasting all of this bitterness. This healing power cleanses our spirits, upon condition of repentance, when our souls are soiled with sin. It can also compensate, “after all we can do,” not only for the consequences of our sins, but also for the harmful effects of our ignorance and neglect." (Beauty for Ashes: The Atonement of Jesus Christ,” Ensign, Apr. 1990, pg 7.)

Comparing and differentiating the steps of “turning away”

Faith in Christ's Power to heal

Both

- Alma 7:11-12 (Alma the Younger)
"he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that *he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people* according to their infirmities."
 - succor: go to the aid of; relieve
 - Atonement allows us to give away the pain – receive succor
 - He understands
 - We can not say – "you don't understand"
 - When we have someone who understands us it lightens our minds
 - He has been there
 - We can not say – "you don't know what it is like"
 - We have a companion in our trials and burdens
- Tad Callister:
"There is a miraculous rebirth, a spiritual phoenix that emerges with our acceptance of the Savior and His Atonement. His spirit heals; it refines; it comforts; it breathes new life into hopeless hearts. It has the power to transform all that is ugly and vicious and worthless in life into something of supreme and glorious splendor. He has the power to convert the ashes of mortality to the beauties of eternity." ("The Infinite Atonement", 206-7)

Recognition/acknowledgement

Both

- Acknowledgement of source of bitterness
- Clarify our responsibility

Sin

- Conviction of guilt

Tragedy

- Conviction of innocence
 - Sometimes victims think they bear responsibility
- Recognize that bad things will happen to all of us
- Recognize that even when we "choose the better part" or "do what is right" doesn't mean we get to choose what experiences we will have in life – we avoid consequences of sin but not life itself.
- Acknowledge that we are effected
 - Sometimes we try to sweep our feelings under the rug or into a corner and refuse to acknowledge them

- Until we acknowledge them we can not replace the “bitter” with “sweet”

Remorse

Sin

- Godly sorrow required

Tragedy

- *Its OK* to feel bitterness, sorrow, wishing it had never happened and other feelings
 - Part of tasting the bitter
 - *Not OK* to hold on to these feelings
- Often we feel remorse at not being able to break out of the of the bitterness box
 - Feeling trapped in the bitterness cycle

Confession

Both

- Reveal
 - Lessening of the burden

Sin

- Must confess to the Lord and sometimes to Priesthood Authority

Tragedy

- Often we try to hide that we are feeling bitter
- We need to admit and face up to our true feelings, that we are hurt or feeling bitter
 - To the Lord
 - Sometimes to a Bishop
 - Sometimes to a Spouse
- Abuse
 - Sometimes stopping the sin of others requires confession by the victim
- Often part of confession for tragedy is confession of sin (pride, unwillingness to forgive etc.) that results from being in the bitterness cycle

Abandonment/Forsake

Both

- Can not wallow in it

Sin

- Give up the sin!

Tragedy

- Give up bitterness!

- Ephesians 4:31-32
"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:
And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you"
- Alma 41:10-15
" For that which ye do send out shall return unto you again"
 - If we are in the gall of bitterness we must give it up to receive the comforts of the Atonement for that which we "*send out will return again unto you*"
- Matt 7:1-2
"For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again"

Cast your burden

Both

- Ask for help, strength, peace
- "Cry out" to Christ
 - Alma 38:8
"and never, *until I did cry out* unto the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, did I receive a remission of my sins"

Restitution

Both

- Matt 5:23-24
" Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;
Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift"
 - Reconcile to others before receiving blessings of the Atonement

Sin

- Repair the wrong

Tragedy

- Matt 5:23-24
 - Just because we bear no responsibility for bitterness received that was caused by someone else's sin does not excuse us from reconciling for other sins
 - Reconciliation is with someone who "hath ought against thee"
 - The instigator or perpetrator in cases where we have 0% responsibility is not likely to whom we must reconcile – it is others
- Abuse - stopping the lie so that restitution may begin

Forgive to be forgiven

Both

- D&C 64:8-10
"ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin.
I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men"
- Alma 41:15
- Mosiah 26:31
- Gordon B Hinckley:
"If there be any who nurture in their hearts the poisonous brew of enmity toward another, I plead with you to ask the Lord for strength to forgive. This expression of desire will be of the very substance of your repentance. It may not be easy, and it may not come quickly. But if you will seek it with sincerity and cultivate it, it will come. And even though he whom you have forgiven continues to pursue and threaten you, you will know you have done what you could to make a reconciliation. There will come into your heart a peace otherwise unattainable." ("Of You It Is Required to Forgive," Ensign, June 1991, 2)
- Boyd K Packer:
"Some frustrations we must endure without really solving the problem. Some things that ought to be put in order are not put in order because we cannot control them. Things we cannot solve, we must survive. If you resent someone for something he has done—or failed to do—forget it. Too often the things we carry are petty, even stupid. If you are still upset after all these years because Aunt Clara didn't come to your wedding reception, why don't you grow up and forget it? If you brood constantly over a loss or a past mistake, look ahead—settle it. We call that forgiveness. Forgiveness is powerful spiritual medicine. To extend forgiveness, that soothing balm, to those who have offended you is to heal. And, more difficult yet, when the need is there, forgive yourself! I repeat, "John, leave it alone. Mary, leave it alone." Purge and cleanse and soothe your soul and your heart and your mind and that of others. A cloud will then be lifted, a beam cast from your eye. There will come that peace which surpasseth understanding." ("Balm of Gilead," Ensign, Nov. 1987, 16)

Stumbling Blocks

- Note that stumbling blocks often lead us to sin and take us to the other end of the spectrum of responsibility

- Thus we get caught in a the vicious cycle (the bitterness cycle)
 - Never getting out of the bitterness box
 - Committing sin as a result of our not getting out

What are the Stumbling blocks?

- Pride
- Lack of knowledge
 - Not understanding the Atonement is not just for sinners
- Lack of Faith
- Brass Serpent (too simple)
- Caught up in the injury itself – becomes our focus
- Wallowing
- We want others to repent before we forgive them
- Hard heart

Giving up bitterness – Casting our burden at the Savior’s feet

Thoughts on *how we can give up bitterness*

Reconsider where our bitterness comes from

- Terrance D Olsen:
 " Bitterness, and feelings like it, cannot develop into a lasting attitude *unless we cultivate these feelings*. In clinging to bitterness, we blind ourselves to the fact that we are doing just that." ("Freedom from Bitterness," Ensign, Aug. 1991, pg 54)

We must not “refuse to be comforted” but allow the Lord to comfort us

- Moses 7:44
 "how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"
- Marvin J Ashton:
 "Some yield to the damaging thought that if there be an all-wise and loving Eternal Father, how could He allow this to happen to me and mine? We allow the heartache to break the band and strengthening tie to Him who has promised to see us successfully through our Gethsemanes. Some of us in our moments of greatest despair turn away in bitterness from the arm of strength, comfort, and peace. Sometimes in our darkest hours we lose sight of the light as we dwell upon the unanswerable questions: “Why does God permit this to happen to me or to our family? What have we done to deserve this?”" ("Roadblocks to Progress," Ensign, May 1979, 67)
- We must repent of spurning the Lord
 - Moses 7:44
 "And as Enoch saw this, he had bitterness of soul, and wept over his brethren, and said unto the heavens: I will refuse to be comforted;

but the Lord said unto Enoch: Lift up your heart, and be glad; and look."

- When Enoch was shown the fate of those in the Flood he had bitterness of soul and refused to be comforted
- When he refused to be comforted he was refusing God
 - *His refusal to be comforted and his bitterness went hand in hand*
- God extended comfort – "Lift up your heart, and be glad; and look." – he showed Enoch that all would have a chance for redemption. Enoch "repented" and later and "received a fullness of joy"
- Moses 7:67 (Enoch)
"And the Lord showed Enoch all things, even unto the end of the world; and he saw the day of the righteous, the hour of their redemption, and received a fulness of joy"

Accept that we are agents unto ourselves

- We can act, not just be acted upon
 - 2 Nephi 2:
"because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon"
 - Ella Wheeler Wilcox:
One ship drives east and another drives west
With the selfsame winds that blow.
'Tis the set of the sails
And not the gales
Which tells us the way to go.
Like the winds of the sea are the ways of fate,
As we voyage along through life:
'Tis the set of a soul
That decides its goal,
And not the calm or the strife.
(“The Winds of Fate”)

Stop the destructive feed back loop

- The loud squeal in the microphone that hurts our ears is caused when sound feeds back into the amplifier which amplifies the sound which then is fed back in a loop by the microphone. This “feedback” loop keeps building the noise louder and louder.

- When we feel ourselves begin to follow well-worn thought paths that act as a feedback loop that we know “amplifies” our feelings of anger, bitterness etc. :
 - Stop and mentally cut this destructive feedback
 - Focus on something else that leads to peaceful thoughts
 - See “Boyd K. Packer, “Inspiring Music—Worthy Thoughts,” Ensign, Jan. 1974, 25

Forgo vindication

- Be comforted to know that the Savior has already suffered scoffs and scorns for us
 - Hymns, 191 – Behold the Great Redeemer Die:
 "While guilty men his pains deride,
 They pierce his hands and feet and side;
 And with insulting scoffs and scorns,
 They crown his head with platted thorns.
 Although in agony he hung,
 No murmuring word escaped his tongue."
- What is important is to know that you know and Heavenly Father knows what the truth is

Turn our focus away from our bitterness to others

- Extend mercy and love
 - Matt 5:7
 "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy"
- Extend forgiveness
- Seek to lift others up
 - Marvin J Ashton:
 "Negative attitudes lived with today cause stagnation, misery, and bitterness tomorrow. It is unproductive for those who should be anxiously engaged in seeking the abundant life to nurse personal hurts. We are all God’s children. If we love Him, we will feed His sheep wherever they may be found, without regard as to our own personal plight or situation. Often we can best feed others when we are hungry ourselves or not completely comfortable in the fold that we presently occupy. Very often those who are hungry, helpless, and cold can best be rescued by those who have been through the same exposures. Marking time or stalling should not be indulged in by the weak, weary, uncertain, and unrecognized. Instead, there is a healing power as we use our energy in action, in service, and in lifting others." ("Roadblocks to Progress," Ensign, May 1979, 67)

Replace fear with faith

- Isaiah 43:1-7
"Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.
When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee"
- Luke 12:6-7
"Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?
But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows"
- D&C 6:36
" Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not"
- D&C 122:9
"Thy days are known, and thy years shall not be numbered less; therefore, fear not what man can do, for God shall be with you forever and ever"
- D&C 50:40-42
"Fear not, little children, for you are mine, and I have overcome the world, and you are of them that my Father hath given me; And none of them that my Father hath given me shall be lost"

Study to discover how such peace is possible

- Savior was not paralyzed by injustices done to him
 - He was innocent and yet suffered more than we ever will
- Look at how others were able to let go

Cast my burden on the Savior, so I can get on with life and be in peace

- Let it go, throw it away
- Action: I don't want it anymore

Soft hearts not hard hearts

- We must repent of other sins so as to soften our hearts
- Jeremiah 18:1-6
"cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand"
- Mosiah 3:19
"... and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of

love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father."

Proper perspective

- Search to have the perspective that bad things happen to all of us and that they may be consecrated for our own good
 - D&C 121:7-8
"My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment;
And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high"
 - Orson F. Whitney:
"No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. It ministers to our education, to the development of such qualities as patience, faith, fortitude, and humility. All that we suffer and all that we endure, especially when we endure it patiently, builds up our characters, purifies our hearts, expands our souls, and makes us more tender and charitable, more worthy to be called the children of God. . . ." (As quoted in Faith Precedes the Miracle, Spencer W Kimball, p. 98)

Recognize it is a process not an event

- Bruce Hafen:
"His words (Matt 11:28-31) do not describe an event, but a process. He does not request the answer to a yes-or-no question, but an essay, written in the winding trail of our experience." (Beauty for Ashes: The Atonement of Jesus Christ," Ensign, Apr. 1990, pg 7.)
- Dallin Oaks:
"Final Judgment is not just an evaluation of a sum total of good and evil acts--what we have done. It is an acknowledgment of the final effect of our acts and thoughts--what we have become. It is not enough for anyone just to go through the motions. The commandments, ordinances, and covenants of the gospel are not a list of deposits required to be made in some heavenly account." ("The Challenge to Become," Ensign, Nov. 2000, 32)

Restore and rebuild confidence through the Savior

- Name Withheld:
"The tides of self-pity, self-reproach, and self-destruction rage against my shore. And at my shore the Savior is ever there, building—shoring up—protecting against the onslaught—telling me I have value—telling me to believe in myself. His is the voice I prefer to hear, the voice I must heed." ("How the Atonement Helped Me Survive Divorce," Ensign, Apr. 1997, 28)

Seek meekness and lowliness of heart

- D&C 19:23
"Learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit, and you shall have peace in me."
- Matt 11:28
"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest....learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls"
- Meekness allows us to endure and learn from "hard things"
 - Neal A. Maxwell
"So, in matters little or large, if our emulation of the Lord is to be serious, we must do more than note and passively admire Jesus' meekness. We must simulate his meekness, remembering that he passed through "all these things," which gave Him, too, needed experiences. (See D&C 122:7.)
Meekness is one of those attributes acquired only by experience, some of it painful, for it is developed "according to the flesh." (Alma 7:11-12.)"
(Meekness—A Dimension of True Discipleship," Ensign, Mar. 1983, 70)
 - Neal A. Maxwell
"Meekness can make another very significant contribution, as it aids us in bearing up under our personal afflictions. (See Mosiah 3:19.) Since the Lord has said he will have a "tried people," how can we possibly endure—without meekness—the tutoring experiences of this mortal probation?"
(Meekness—A Dimension of True Discipleship," Ensign, Mar. 1983, 70)
- Study Christ
 - Do as he did
 - Service, Service, Service
 - Marvin J Ashton:
" During his earthly mission Jesus made every confrontation a learning experience, including those that would be destructive or cause hurt and dissatisfaction. He was never rebellious, never ashamed; always long-suffering, patient, kingly; and never deterred in being about His Father's business. He, too, proved His greatness when His personal pain and suffering were the most intense. Hurting words and unkind deeds never kept Him from reaching His goals. No one can meet life in all its fullness without experiencing hurt, pain, and suffering. " ("Roadblocks to Progress," Ensign, May 1979, 67)

Control Yourself Gently Instead of Harshly

- D&C 121:37,41-42
"but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our

vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men...

...only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; By kindness, and pure knowledge..."

- Mark Chamberlain:

"Many people respond to a relapse by berating themselves. Usually, however, it doesn't help. If harshness incites rebellion from other people, is it any wonder it fails when we use it on ourselves?" (More Than Will Power, How To Overcome A Destructive Habit)

Learning from Alma: "I could remember my pains no more"

- We can look at how Alma was able to be succored from his pain and torment for his sins and apply that to the other end of the spectrum

"Racked" and "harrowed up"

- Alma 36:12-13

"I was *racked* with eternal torment, for my soul was *harrowed up* to the greatest degree and *racked* with all my sins"

- Racked – like stretched on a rack (torture device)
- Harrowed – When a farmer harrows up a field it is torn up

"Cried within my heart"

- Alma 36:18

"I *cried within my heart*: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me"

- Alma 38:8

"And it came to pass that I was three days and three nights in the most bitter pain and anguish of soul; *and never, until I did cry out unto the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, did I receive a remission of my sins*. But behold, I did cry unto him and I did find peace to my soul"

- We need *explicitly* to "cry out"
- Within our hearts
- Verbalize out loud

"I could remember my pains no more"

- Alma 36:19 "I could *remember my pains* no more; yea, I was *harrowed up* by the memory of my sins *no more*"

- Did *not* say he couldn't remember his sins
 - No longer harrowed up when he thought of his pains
 - Memory of the pain, not the sins taken away

- D&C 58:42

"I, the Lord, remember them no more"

- The Lord remembers no more, doesn't say we won't remember

- Sometimes we think we should not be able to remember our sins, that is not necessarily the case, rather we will no longer be pained by the thought of our sins

Filled with joy and light

- Alma 36:20-21

"what *joy, and what marvelous light* I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!

Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so *exquisite and so bitter* as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so *exquisite and sweet* as was my joy"

- Atonement replaces
 - Pain with joy
 - bitter with sweet

Learning from Alma again: "Swallowed up in Joy"

- Alma 31:38 (Alma the Younger, Sons of Mosiah, Zeezrom, Amulek, Alma's sons)

"And the Lord provided for them that they should hunger not, neither should they thirst; yea, and he also gave them strength, that they should suffer no manner of afflictions, *save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ.*"

- Childbirth (example)
 - pain swallowed up in the joy of birth of a child
- The refining heat may come but our pain may be "swallowed up in the joy of Christ" making the burden light that we may endure it well

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