



CORNUCOPIA

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Mormon Musings

EVEN IF . . .

BEFORE OUR SON WAS BORN, MY WIFE, EMILY, AND I, like most expectant parents, I'm sure, played the "what if" game. This diabolical game works to scare expecting parents, making them think about serious possibilities they rarely if ever considered as they were trying to conceive. *What if* our son is born with a life-threatening illness? *What if* he has a disability that severely affects him for the rest of his life? *What if* he has a learning disability? *What if*, as a teenager, he does drugs? *What if* he tells us when he's fourteen that he's already sexually active? *What if* he tells us that he's not only sexually active, but also that he's gay? *What if* he decides he doesn't want to be a Mormon? *What if* he tells us he's an atheist? And so on, and so on.

Emily and I pondered these possibilities (and dozens more) in restaurants, on car rides, on the phone, while we lay awake in bed, at the breakfast table, everywhere. As we wrestled with these questions, we usually ended with self-congratulatory comments about how loving, understanding, charitable, and accepting we would be as parents. There would be challenges, we knew, but we would love our son no matter what we faced.

Then, until a week before he was born, the most terrifying prospect of all crossed my mind. How had I not thought of it before? In all our *what ifing*, how could Emily and I not have contemplated such a disturbing possibility? Yet there it was, right in front of me. I had to confront it. *What if . . . what if* my son became an iron-rod Latter-day Saint?

Suddenly, all the other possibilities overwhelmed me. *What if* he likes Michael McLean music? *What if* he thinks *Saturday's Warrior* is a brilliant piece of work? *What if* Elder McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine* turns out to be his favorite book? *What if* he likes seminary? *What if* he doesn't think Church is boring—ever? *What if* he is becomes of those people who writes Robert Kirby to tell him he is going to hell? *What if* he thinks watching *Schindler's List* is a grievous sin? *What if* he thinks challenging issues in Church history or doctrine don't matter because they aren't "pertinent to his salvation"? My mind swirled!

Like many fathers, I look forward to watching football with my son. I can hardly wait for him to get old enough to challenge me at video games. I'm anxious to teach him how to mow the lawn and fix things around the house. But more than any-

thing, I want a boy whom I can talk Mormonism with when I'm older. I've had lengthy daydreams about myself at age fifty, my son at twenty-five, hanging out and discussing various aspects of Mormon history, theology, and intellectualism. Yes, yes, I know, it's a long shot to have a child who is as interested in these things as I am. And I also know that perhaps by then, I may have lost my own love and fascination with these things. But I was always aware of this possibility and have mentally prepared for it. But to have a child who is the very antithesis of what I am—I suddenly wasn't sure I could handle that.

A week later, my wife and I were enjoying my birthday with a quiet celebration at home. Our Scrabble game was interrupted by labor pains and a trip to the hospital. (To this day, I think this was a bit contrived, since I'd just gotten 78 points for "shingle") And then, finally, the time came. Our son was born at 12:05 a.m., 3 September 2002, five minutes after his father's birthday. I would have loved to have shared a birthday with him—but I suspect that in a few years, he will be very grateful to have his own day. Perhaps this is his first rebellion against me? Perhaps it's a sign that my daydream won't be come true? Or, more likely, it doesn't mean anything at all and it's just how nature worked that day. But despite my disappointment at his just missing my birthday, as I looked at him while Emily held him, I knew that I really *could* love him no matter what. Even if he becomes an iron-rod Latter-day Saint.

—JOHN HATCH
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Twenty Years Ago in Sunstone

IN A DIFFERENT VOICE

FOR THE BETTER PART OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, people have interchanged male and female roles and stereotypes as a form of entertainment. Early on, in burlesque shows or skits such as "If Men Played Cards as Women Do," men mostly imitated women (and almost never in the cause of enlightenment). This changed, however, in the 1970s and '80s as various writers began experimenting with role-reversal as a powerful tool for highlighting underlying themes in gendered discourse. Within Mormonism, Elouise Bell's "The Meeting" and Carol Lynn Pearson's "Take a Walk in the Pink Moccasins" were early examples of this type of experimental writing. SUNSTONE also published a role-reversal piece in its July/August 1982 issue, Richard K. Circuit's "New Policies (Tribute to Manhood)," from which the following is excerpted:

Lighter minds

Some of today's best Mormon cultural critique and edgiest humor can be found in the bi-weekly e-zine, *The Sugar Beet*, <www.thesugarbeet.com>. In the *Beet* almost everything Mormon gets a turn on the slow roaster. (Sunstone's already had a few good skewerings.) Here's a message from one of the *Beet*'s, um . . . sponsors.



3. SUNDAY EVENING: Dinner Honoring Men . . . Suggested menu should emphasize healthy non-fattening foods, but meat loaf, potatoes and gravy, or casseroles are acceptable. After dinner, show the new Church film strip "Nine Statues of Manhood." This unique film strip shows the nine new statues which were created by a prominent Church sculptress, Eva Farbank, for the new Manhood Visitors Pavilion located in Orem, Utah. Each statue depicts a phase of man's traditional, spiritual or temporal experience. The film strip was developed for the Church by the Department of Male Studies at Brigham Young University.

The Church has announced that commencing 20 September 2082 (and each year thereafter except leap years) a special week of activities will be convened for the purpose of honoring the men of the Church. A spokeswoman for the Church said the new program is designed to emphasize the major role that men have played in Church History. She noted that Mormon men were some of the nation's foremost nineteenth century suffragists, advocating the once-controversial policy "One Man, One Vote." . . . According to the Church spokeswoman, although the Church has come under severe attack by its enemies for opposing the so-called MRA (Male Rights Amendment), it has always recognized the unique contribution of fathers to the institution of the family and hopes the "Tribute to Manhood Week" will demonstrate that Mormon men are loved and respected by their Church.

SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR WARD ACTIVITIES DURING "TRIBUTE TO MANHOOD WEEK"

1. FRIDAY EVENING: "Follow the Sisters"

The Friday evening program shall be entitled "Follow the Sisters" and shall focus on the blessings that men receive by obeying the counsel of the Sisters. You may want to . . . [host] a panel discussion of three successful brothers on the topic "Perils of Fatherhood in the Twenty Eighties." At least one panel member should be a working father; another, a father with several young children at home; and third, a father with several grown children, including at least three teenage daughters. This panel should be moderated by the Young Women's President. The meeting shall be conducted by the Relief Society President. . . . The opening and closing prayers may be offered by brothers. Light refreshments may be served.

2. SATURDAY AFTERNOON: Manhood Handicraft Fair

This activity shall be conducted in the ward cultural hall. Booths shall be constructed so that all men in your ward can demonstrate their handicrafts and hobbies. . . . Men should be allowed to actually demonstrate their crafts and may want to wear their work-about clothes. However, all Relief Society members should dress in Sunday clothes to show proper respect for the manly crafts demonstrated at the handicraft fair.

Cybersaints

SINCE PARALLEL LINES MEET

A fairly common query on LDS email lists concerns how others maintain their faith in the face of challenging historical or doctrinal incongruities. What is not so common is finding as thoughtful a response as the one we spotted and include here. It was posted on the now-defunct e-list, "LDS Bookshelf" by Ardis Parshall, a genealogist and independent historian in Orem, Utah. We print it here with her permission.

I DISCOVERED GEOMETRY WHEN I WAS THIRTEEN, and that discovery was as exciting and illuminating to me as religion or philosophy or literature is to other young people. Geometry organized my world, gave me logical principles to analyze anything, banished ambiguity from everything—"Euclid alone has looked on Beauty bare." Sounds silly, I know, but so do most teenager discoveries.

I discovered non-Euclidean geometry when I was twenty-four, and it was unsettling. One of the key principles of Euclidean geometry is, of course, that parallel lines never meet. In some non-Euclidean geometries, parallel lines must meet at one or even many points. Imagine the lines of longitude drawn on a globe—the lines are parallel at the Equator, but they all meet at a single point at the North Pole. Space curves to follow the surface of the Earth (which it may in reality do) rather than extending indefinitely in a flat table as Euclid envisioned.

Did that mean that Euclidean geometry was false and that I had to abandon it or live on in disillusioned disappointment? Of course not. Everything I had learned about geometry was still true, merely incomplete; I only had to adjust my understanding a tiny bit, and then go on to explore the new universes opened by Gauss and Bolyai and Lobachevsky and Riemann.

That experience inoculated me against disillusionment when I discovered Mormon history. What I learned in the past doesn't become false when I'm exposed to a new aspect of the historical record: If Joseph Smith was a prophet when I was fourteen (and I believed he was), he's still a prophet now that I know more about polygamy.

Praise to the Man

REALITY CHECK

QUICK, THINK: “LIZ LEMON SWINDLE.” If warm, gooey, family-values-laden images of the Prophet Joseph don’t immediately flood your mind, you just might be out of touch with the



My Beloved Emma, by Liz Lemon Swindle

Mormon *Zeitgeist*.

Swindle has done thirty- or forty-odd portraits of the Prophet, in various action poses, that have been very well received by the Deseret Book-loving crowd. In one painting, Joseph wears a toothy grin and a bleached white blouse as he romps with his frolicsome young sons; in another, he’s clutching his father in a joyously tearful, dripping, baptismal embrace; in one more,

he’s gazing ponderously through the window at a leaden, autumn landscape, his back darkly shadowed, his face to the light.

These paintings strive to be heroic, even titanic in spirit, while yet keeping Joseph earthy, in the here-and-now, within arm’s reach. Swindle’s Joseph is often stately and statuesque, and yet at other times, he is almost a huggable lug, a favorite uncle. But he is always virile, unspoiled, pristine, as if he himself were a grand western landscape in human form. (Swindle was a wildlife painter before finding Joseph as her *objet d’art*.) Though mawkish, these paintings perhaps sum two natures we Latter-day Saints are wont to grant our Prophet: to us he is an almost mythical, God-sent rock for all ages who can yet be sensitive enough to reach out and stroke Emma’s hair with soft, new-agey hands; he is big enough to fulfill all the world’s dire needs, yet small enough to reside as a personal chum in each of our hearts; we want him unknowably deep, and yet readily embraceable, even if, alas, we accept a two-dimensional caricature of the real Joseph Smith in order to have the prophet we can be comfortable with.

The historical figures I honored when I thought of them as marbleized demigods are still honorable now that I know them as human beings: When I was fourteen, I thought Brigham Young had accomplished miraculous feats, and I still think he had access to divine assistance even though I now know him to be someone who probably would have bullied me had I been in his circle.

I know now that few people can tolerate much ambiguity, and I recognize the tendency to invent seemingly logical explanations of gospel principles we don’t understand. Explanations of why blacks were denied the priesthood for so long are obvious fabrications of this kind, without basis in revelation. (Please note that I am referring to the rationalizations, such as the “not valiant in the war in heaven” or “Abel’s unborn children must be deified before Cain’s posterity will be redeemed” theories, and I am not commenting on the priesthood ban itself.) Because human beings struggle to understand a principle doesn’t mean that the principle is false—or that I am bound by

anyone’s fumbling attempts to explain the difficulty.

I believe Joseph Smith saw visions and received heavenly visitors; the fact of those visions and revelations does not change because Michael Quinn explores folk magic, or because Mark Hofmann produces a “salamander letter,” or because Rick Grunder locates undeniable parallels between Joseph Smith’s words and ideas common in the wider culture of the day. I realize no new discovery is ever going to be the last word on the subject. Next year, the year after that, and ten years from now, historians are going to uncover as-yet-unimagined documents that will modify the record again. And yet, if Joseph Smith was a prophet, as I believe him to have been, those discoveries need not affect my faith, only my understanding of chronology and personalities and external forces.

In short, I keep my faith by admitting that my childhood understanding was not complete nor perfect. When some new piece of history jars, I backtrack far enough to find the root of the discord. I study (through both faith and reason) to find what is essential to the gospel, and what is culture or assumption or faulty human interpretation—and occasionally resort to filing the matter away as “unresolved for now.” I make the necessary adjustment in my outlook and get on with life.

If God lives, and if he has a particular interest in the human family and each individual within it, and if he has a plan for our eventual salvation and happiness, and if he has revealed that plan, however incom-

pletely, to man, then none of that can be changed by the historical record of the imperfect words and actions of man.

Margin Notes

“AND NOT OF MYSELF”

There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated. And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.
—D&C 130:20-21

SO MANY LDS DISCUSSIONS ABOUT OBEDIENCE and obtaining blessings revolve around this scripture and its straightforward, formulaic explanation: When we obey a law, we will receive the blessings attached. Understandably, this interpretation has wide appeal—after all, wouldn’t it be nice if we knew which, preferably not uncom-

fortable, steps would guarantee a desired outcome? How many parents would not love a sure-fire guide to raising toddlers and teenagers, e.g. obey the Law of Correct Parenting embodied in these 12 concrete steps, and you will be blessed with children who honor you, serve honorable missions, and marry in the temple? We also cling to these verses because great comfort flows from the confidence that we will be rewarded for our righteousness.

More fundamentally, this passage reassures because it reflects one aspect of God's divine character: integrity. Indeed, Joseph Smith taught in the Lectures on Faith that we cannot

have faith in a god who lies (3:22); the knowledge that such a being could renege on his word and deny us the promised blessings for which we work so diligently would spawn nagging doubts incompatible with faith. Furthermore, Moroni taught that if God changed, he would cease to be God (Morm. 9:19). This integrity is an essential character trait for becoming a god; and given his perfect nature, we have every reason for absolute confidence that God will honor his commitments. We may even feel we have earned our blessings; after all, we're working within the framework God established, and obedience brings blessings. This feeling of entitlement is reminiscent

Translated Correctly

“FOR EVERY MAN MUST ‘SHOULDER HIS OWN PACK’”

GALATIANS 6: 1–10

KING JAMES VERSION

THE REVISED ENGLISH BIBLE Oxford and Cambridge University Presses, 1989

THE NEW TESTAMENT IN MODERN ENGLISH (PHILLIPS)

MacMillan, 1972

CHAPTER 6

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

2 Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

3 For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

4 But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.

5 For every man shall bear his own burden.

6 Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.

7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

8 For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

9 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

10 As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

6 ¹If anyone is caught doing something wrong, you, my friends, who live by the Spirit must gently set him right. Look to yourself, each one of you: you also may be tempted. ²Carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.

³If anyone imagines himself to be somebody when he is nothing, he is deluding himself. ⁴Each of you should examine his own conduct, and then he can measure his achievement by comparing himself with himself and not with anyone else; ⁵for everyone has his own burden to bear.

⁶When anyone is under instruction in the faith, he should give his teacher a share of whatever good things he has.

⁷Make no mistake about this: God is not to be fooled; everyone reaps what he sows.

⁸If he sows in the field of his unspiritual nature, he will reap from it a harvest of corruption; but if he sows in the field of the Spirit, he will reap from it a harvest of eternal life. ⁹Let us never tire of doing good, for if we do not slacken our efforts we shall in due time reap our harvest.

¹⁰Therefore, as opportunity offers, let us work for the good of all, especially members of the household of the faith.

CHAPTER 6

Some practical wisdom

EVEN if a man should be detected in some sin, my brothers, the spiritual ones among you should quietly set him back on the right path, not with any feeling of superiority but being yourselves on guard against temptation. Carry each other's burdens and so live out the law of Christ.

If a man thinks he is "somebody" when he is nobody, he is deceiving himself. Let every man learn to assess properly the value of his own work and he can then be rightly proud when he has done something worth doing, without depending on the approval of others. For every man must "shoulder his own pack."

The man under Christian instruction should be willing to share the good things of life with his teacher.

The inevitability of life's harvest

Don't be under any illusion: you cannot make a fool of God! A man's harvest in life will depend entirely on what he sows. If he sows for his own lower nature his harvest will be the decay and death of this own nature. But if he sows for the Spirit he will reap the harvest of everlasting life from that Spirit. Let us not grow tired of doing good, for, unless we throw in our hand, the ultimate harvest is assured. Let us then do good to all men as opportunity offers, especially to those who belong to the Christian household.

All-seeing eye

SYNCRETISM

SURROUNDED BY ICONS OF THE Virgin Mary, LDS artist Del Parson's 1983 image, *The Lord Jesus Christ*, stands next to the Weeping Virgin Tree on the corner of 700 South and 300 East in Salt Lake City. Popular with Catholic faithful, a shrine has existed at this site since 1997 when a local resident discovered the image of the Virgin Mary in one of the tree's knotholes.



of the Pilgrims' pride that their prosperity was proof that they were God's elect.

An important perspective on divine blessings absent in this Doctrine and Covenants passage emerges in Enoch's words to the Lord during his great vision of the course of human history, "Thou hast made me, and given unto me a right to thy throne, and not of myself, but through thine own grace" (Moses 7:59). Despite our obedience, our right to God's throne comes "not of [ourselves], but through [God's] own grace." That God instituted this system such that we may ultimately become "joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:17), receiving all that God hath, is an example of his love, an act of grace. That we were born as spirits and that we now live on this earth with an opportunity to reap the rewards of obedience are further manifestations of grace. God's system for blessing us is completely imbued with grace.

Living the gospel takes hard work and great sacrifice. In my own experience, striving to overcome the "natural man" and to establish Zion has required me to leave my comfort zone, venture into many uncomfortable situations, and take the types of risks I normally avoid; tracting as a missionary and serving in the nursery as a childless adult were unfamiliar and, initially, quite intimidating. But I am well rewarded as I grow to love those whom I serve, and the fear fades away. I find myself experiencing a change of heart with new desires replacing the old, and I am confronted with the temptation to take credit for God's handiwork. "How awesome am I!" I am inclined to think, as I see myself becoming more Christlike. But such smug satisfaction leads me to self-congratulatory self-righteousness that diverts me from the path of discipleship and impedes my caring for others. So while I strive to become attuned to and obedient to God's will and to trust his system of rewards, I must also endeavor to recall God's perfection and love—without which such a sublime system would not exist.

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The Rest of the Story

ROMANCING THE STONE

LIKE OTHER CHRISTIANS, MOST LATTER-DAY SAINTS tend to read bible texts quite uncritically, focusing primarily on their messages and potential applications today rather than on what the writers had in mind as they wrote. One example in which Latter-day Saints have applied to a text an understanding that is quite at odds with how most biblical scholars interpret its intent and meaning is Nebuchadnezzar's dream found in the Book of Daniel.

Ostensibly, the book of Daniel was written about and by a young man with that name who lived in the Babylonian courts of 600 B.C., but scholars have nearly unanimously concluded the book was written much later. They point to the

languages (Hebrew and Aramaic) Daniel's author uses, noting that although ancient, the styles and construction employed were not found during that period, arising only about 200 B.C. Thus, on linguistic evidence alone, they assert a much later date for Daniel's composition.

But even stronger evidences for dating the text and understanding its author's true purposes are internal to the book itself, most apparent in the passages about Nebuchadnezzar's dream in which he saw an image, described as a statue with a head of gold, and with the remainder of the body composed of lesser materials, including silver, bronze, iron, and clay (Daniel 2:31–35). In the dream, the king then saw a stone, cut from the mountain without human hands, strike the statue in the legs, causing it to shatter into bits. The stone then continued to increase in size until it filled the whole earth.

Mormons have long interpreted this "stone" as a prophecy concerning the latter-day restored church, but most biblical scholars understand it quite differently. These scholars interpret the gold head as representing Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, which was overthrown by the Medes (silver kingdom), who in turn were conquered by the Persians (bronze), led by Cyrus the Great. The iron kingdom represents the time of Greek rule, with the clay symbolizing the weakness of Alexander the Great's fragmented empire that was divided into the twin kingdoms of the Ptolemys and the Seleucids. Because the dream recorded in Daniel ignores the Roman empire that followed Alexander, scholars again place the book's composition near 200 B.C.

But chapter 8 of Daniel provides clues that help scholars date the book even more precisely. The writer places Daniel standing in Susa during the Babylonian Exile and predicting the future. In a vision, Daniel sees a ram with two horns pushing westward, northward, and southward, representing the Median and Persian empires, which held lands to the west, north and south. Daniel sees the ram challenged by a goat from the west (Alexander the Great), whose horn is broken and replaced by four smaller horns, representing the contested

kingdoms of Alexander following his death. Scholars further contend that the little horn in verse 9 which magnified itself even to disturbing the temple offerings to God refers to King Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who ruled from 175 to 164 B.C. The Jews hated Antiochus for his attempts to hellenize them, including forcing them to abandon their dietary laws. The height of his infamy had come when, in 168 B.C., he erected a statue of Zeus in the temple at Jerusalem, a sacrilege that became known as the “abomination of desolation” (Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:11).

At the end of Daniel’s vision, he reports a conversation between two heavenly beings, in which was asked,

How long will the vision about the regular sacrifice apply, while the transgression causes horror, so as to allow both the holy place [the temple] and the host [the Jews] to be trampled? And he said to me, “For 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the holy place will be properly restored (Daniel 8:13-14, N.A.S.).

This period of “2,300 evenings and mornings” can be interpreted as 1,150 days, or three and a half years (Harry M. Buck, *People of the Lord: The History, Scriptures, and Faith of Ancient Israel* [New York: MacMillan Company, 1966], 539). It is likely that the rededication of the temple by Judas the Maccabee, in 165 B.C., three years after its desecration by Antiochus, is the fulfillment of this prophecy.

From these evidences, scholars place the writing of Daniel sometime near 165 B.C., with the author interpreting the Maccabean revolt as the start of God’s hand in restoring his kingdom to the earth—which the author symbolizes as a stone cut from a mountain without hands. Ultimately, the revolt failed to free the Jews from foreign rule, and the Romans soon assumed control of Judea.

Daniel’s “vision” failed—and it is this failure that allows scholars to date the text’s composition with such precision. With the advantage of hindsight, the writer was able to predict events with great accuracy. But once the writer attempted genuine prophecy—the victory of the Maccabean revolt—his prophecies faltered, becoming vague and ultimately, unfulfilled. Where actual history deviates from the timeline described in Daniel’s vision, the writer of Daniel and the stone “cut out of the mountain without hands” can be found.

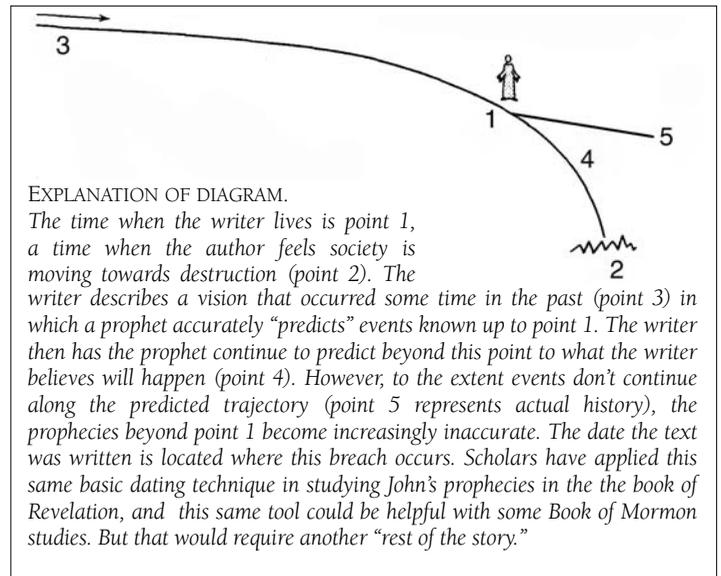
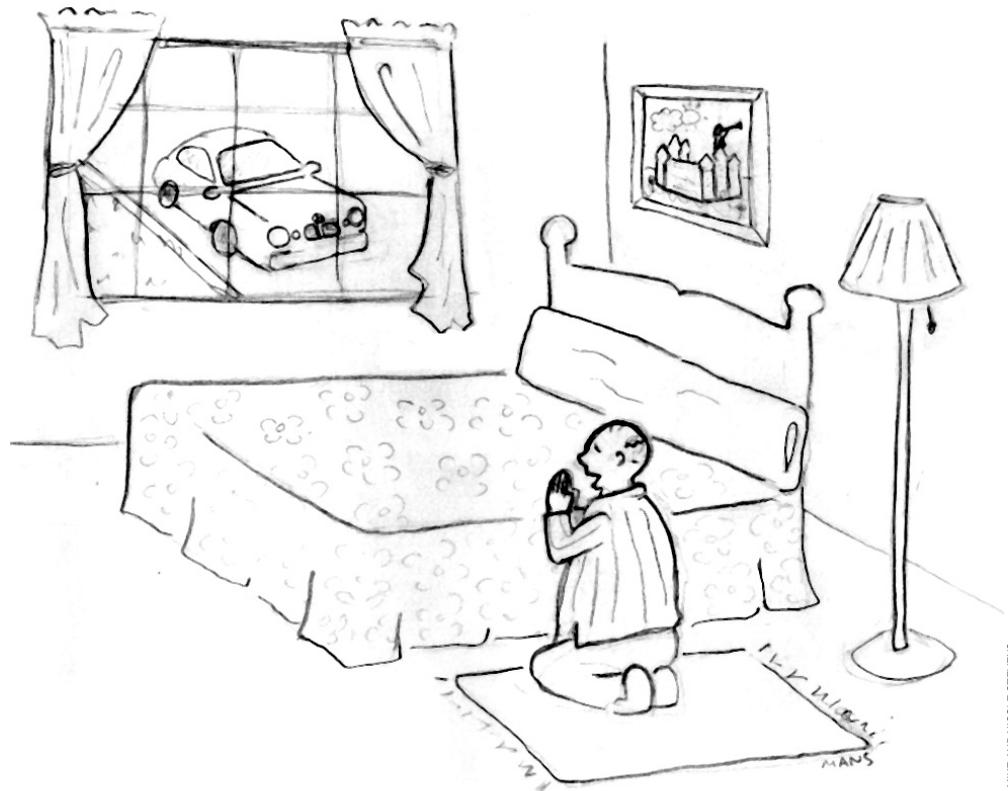


FIGURE AND EXPLANATION ADAPTED FROM HARRY M. BUCK, PEOPLE OF THE LORD

BRIAN H. STUY
 Lehi, Utah



To comment on something you read, or to view comments made by others, visit our website: <www.Sunstoneonline.com>.



MIKE AND NICOLE STEVENS

“... and I thank thee for keeping us safe from the evils of cola drinks, body piercings and tattoos, and I pray that we may continue to be worthy of the privilege of consuming a disproportionate share of the world’s resources. . . .”