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Come Unto Christ

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Come Unto Christ

HENRY B. EYRING

You have moments when you want to be better than you have ever been. Those feelings may be triggered by seeing a person or a family living in a way that lifts your heart with a yearning to live that way, too. The longing to be better may come from reading the words of a book or even from hearing a few bars of music. For me, it has come in all those ways, and more.

A Future Home

One of my early memories is reading the scriptures in a school room. The law of the land did not yet forbid it, so the Princeton, New Jersey, public schools began each school day with a standard ritual. I can't remember the sequence, but I remember the content. In our classroom, we pledged allegiance to the flag—in unison, standing hand over heart. One student, a different one each school day, read verses he or she had chosen from the Bible, and then we recited aloud together the Lord's Prayer.

So about every twenty-five school days, my turn came to choose the scripture. I always chose the same one, so my classmates must have known what was coming when it was my day. I don't remember when I first heard the

words; that is lost in the mists of childhood. But I can recite them to you now, and with them the feelings come back. It happened every time, and it still does:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

[1 Corinthians 13:1–2]

You remember the rest, through that thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. By the time I read the first few words, the feeling would come back. The feeling was not just that the words were true, but that they were about some better world I wanted with all my heart to live in. For me, the feeling was even more specific, and I knew it did not come from

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within me. It was that there would or could be some better life, and that it would be in a family I would someday have. In that then-distant future, I would be able to live with people in some better, kinder way, beyond even the best and the kindest world I had known as a boy.

Now, little boys don't talk about such things, not to anyone. You might confide in someone that you wanted to play big league baseball someday. But you wouldn't say that you knew someday you'd have a home where you would feel the way you felt when you heard the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. So I never talked with anyone about those feelings.

When I was eleven, my parents dropped me off at the Salt Lake City home of my great uncle Gaskell Romney. He was a patriarch and, because he was my father's uncle, he could give me, a boy from the mission field, a patriarchal blessing. I don't think he even sat down to visit with me. He didn't know me except as my father's son. He just led me through the house to a room where a recording device was on a table. He sat me down facing a fireplace, put his hands on my head, and began to give first my lineage and then a blessing.

He began to tell me about the home in which I would someday be the father. That's when I opened my eyes. I know the stones in the fireplace were there because I began to stare at them. I wondered, "How can this man know what is only in my heart?" He described in concrete detail what had been only a yearning; but I could recognize it. It was the desire of my heart, that future home and family that I thought was secret. But it was not secret, because God knew.

Now your impressions will not have been quite like mine, but you have felt a tug, maybe many tugs, to be someone better. And what sets those yearnings apart from all your day-dreams is that they were not about being richer, or smarter, or more attractive, but about

being better. I am sure you have had such moments, not just from my experience, but because of what President David O. McKay once said. Listen very carefully:

Man is a spiritual being, a soul, and at some period of his life everyone is possessed with an irresistible desire to know his relationship to the Infinite. . . . There is something within him which urges him to rise above himself, to control his environment, to master the body and all things physical and live in a higher and more beautiful world. [David O. McKay, *True to the Faith*, comp. Llewelyn R. McKay (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), p. 244]

That pull upward is far beyond what you would call a desire for self-improvement. When I felt it, I knew I was being urged to live so far above myself that I could never do it on my own. President McKay had it right. You feel an urging to rise above your natural self. What you have felt is an urging from your Heavenly Father to accept this invitation:

O, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.

And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot. [Moroni 10:32–33]

That urge to rise above yourself is a recognition of your need for the Atonement to work in your life, and your need to be sure that it is working. After all you can do, after all your

effort, you need confidence that the Atonement is working for you and on you.

Something Better Drawing Us Up

You may feel that upward pull tonight. I did one afternoon when I came to understand, as I hadn't before, how much I need the Atonement, what I could do to make it work in my life, and what evidence I could have that it was working.

It was in a place like this, but not so large. It was the hour of a devotional at Ricks College. I wasn't the speaker; I was sitting there, just behind and to the right of the speaker. I've still got the book, here in my hand, that I held that day. It still has the words in the margins that I wrote then, although the page and the book show signs of use.

In my memory, the room that afternoon was almost as light as the sunshine, and as warm. The speaker was Elder A. Theodore Tuttle. I suppose there was a spotlight on his face. Stages always seem light when you're on them. But the brightness was in more than what I saw. It was inside me that day. I think it happened because I walked into that room with the yearning President McKay says will come to everyone. And for me that day it was irresistible; I was in the right place with the right preparation.

I had been trying hard, and yet I wanted to know: "Isn't there something more I can do?" And Elder Tuttle told me there was and that I would need the Atonement of Jesus Christ working in my life to go where I wanted to go. And so that afternoon lives on the pages of this book, and in my life. In case you're having one of the days President McKay said you would, I thought I ought to pass it on.

That's how Elder Tuttle began. He talked about how someone had passed it to him. He said he had taken a trip to South America on assignment with Joseph Fielding Smith, then a member of the Council of the Twelve. That was in the days when you went to South America

by ship. Elder Smith could have used the time to rest. And he could have let Elder Tuttle rest. But he didn't. He organized daily scripture study, sitting on the deck in those wooden slat chairs most of you have only seen in old movies. They read their scriptures together, and they discussed them, and they marked them. And so what I have written on this page, in the margins, was written by Elder Tuttle in his Doctrine and Covenants on the ship's deck as Elder Smith taught it to him. I can only imagine who passed it to Elder Smith. And now I'm passing it on to you.

This page is the second sheet in the old edition of the triple combination, section nineteen of the Doctrine and Covenants. On the bottom, in capital letters, is written: REPENTANCE. And then an arrow leads to a notation that reads: "Greek word. To have a new mind."

In the very back of my book I had already written a list of words, gospel concepts, and then, for each, a key scripture. Doctrine and Covenants section 19 became the scripture where I would ever after turn to find the network of scriptures on repentance I got from Elder Tuttle's days of being tutored on the deck, sailing south. This was before the invention of the topical guide, which I suppose is why I don't build those networks anymore. But he did it for me, and so around the margins of that second page of the nineteenth section I have written ten scriptural references I got that afternoon with his brief description of why they matter. Somehow he got them all taught in less than an hour, and into my heart. He was a master teacher. I won't try that. But I will give you the few scriptures that have made the most difference—all the difference for me—in knowing how to reach for that something better you and I sometimes feel drawing us up.

The first is not in the margin but is from the section itself. I heard it that day with new meaning. It begins with the fifteenth verse.

Therefore I command you to repent—repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and your sufferings be sore—how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not.

For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent;

But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I. [D&C 19: 15–17]

As he read those words that day, I felt the overwhelming suffering of the Savior. And then two things dawned on me. First, if I could not repent to qualify for his atonement for my sins, I must suffer to the limit of my power to suffer. And, second, with all the requisite suffering of my own, with all I could bear, it would still not be enough. I would still be forever shut out of the only place where there will be the warmth of family, the family of my Heavenly Father whom I have loved and whom I miss, and that of my family here. Somehow I had gotten the idea that the choice was between repenting or not. And then I realized that whatever pain repentance might bring in this life, it was certainly no more than the pain I would face if I did not repent here, and yet that later pain could not lift me home. It could not bring the mercy I needed.

A determination flowed into me both to stay as far as I could from sin and to gain a confidence that my sins were being remitted. In that moment, the penalty for taking chances with sin or with forgiveness loomed larger than I had ever imagined it could. I wanted with all my heart to know both that the Atonement was curing the effects of sin in me and that I was being strengthened against future sin. I wanted confidence whereas before I had been content with hope.

What I wanted, then, was to know what I could do to gain assurance that I was on the path home. Specific steps to assure that the Atonement is at work in your life will not always be the same. For some, at one point,

it would be to see a bishop, a judge in Israel, to confess serious sin and to seek help. For another, it would be to accept baptism. But for everyone, at every stage of purification, there are constants. One is this: reception of the Holy Ghost is the cleansing agent as the Atonement purifies you.

President Marion G. Romney taught it this way: “Receiving the Holy Ghost is the therapy which effects forgiveness and heals the sin-sick soul” (*Ensign*, May 1974, p. 92). The Savior said it this way: “Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day” (3 Nephi 27:20). Moroni also spoke of being wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost after baptism.

Now that is a fact you can act on with confidence. You can invite the Holy Ghost’s companionship in your life. And you can know when he is there, and when he withdraws. And when he is your companion, you can have confidence that the Atonement is working in your life.

You can make some choices tonight that will bring the Holy Ghost to you as your companion.

You are all called of God to serve his children. You may be called as a clerk or a home teacher or a visiting teacher. You all are a son or daughter or a brother or sister. None of those are accidental calls. And each places you in service to invite someone to choose the right, to come unto Christ. None of the people for whom you are responsible can be truly served without your bearing testimony, in some way, of the mission of Jesus Christ.

Now you know that the mission of the Holy Ghost is to bear testimony of the Savior. When in faith and under assignment you go forth to do that, the Holy Ghost is your ally. The Savior said: “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the

Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me" (John 15:26).

You could, this moment, begin to think of those for whom you bear responsibility. If you do, and do it with the intent to serve them, a face or a name will come to you. If you do something tonight and make some attempt to help that person come unto Christ, I cannot promise you a miracle, but I can promise you this: you will feel the influence of the Holy Ghost helping you, and you will feel approval. And you will know that, for at least those minutes, the power of the Holy Ghost was with you. And you will know that some healing came into your soul, for the Spirit will not dwell in an unclean tabernacle. His influence cleanses.

Not only is your feeling the influence of the Holy Ghost a sign that the Atonement, the cure for sin, is working in your life, but you will also know that a preventative against sin is working.

Protection Against Sin

The effects of the Atonement—the lack of pride, of envy, of malice—are a shield against temptation. The Savior taught that in another of those references written in the margin around my copy of the nineteenth section of the Doctrine and Covenants. It directs me to the first verse in section 95 of the Doctrine and Covenants. The first verse reads this way:

Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you whom I love, and whom I love I also chasten that their sins may be forgiven, for with the chastisement I prepare a way for their deliverance in all things out of temptation, and I have loved you. [D&C 95:1]

I bear you my testimony that God loves you and that he has prepared a way for your deliverance in all things out of temptation. In that verse the Lord was announcing a chastisement because his people had not built his house as he had commanded. He called that a grievous

sin. But the Lord taught that the chastisement that would prepare them to be forgiven would also produce a shield against temptation.

I bear you my testimony that the broken heart and contrite spirit that are the requirements for forgiveness are also its fruits. The very humility that is the sign of having been forgiven is protection against future sin. And it is by avoiding future sin that we retain a remission of the sins of the past.

You may not know when you have been fully baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, but you can know you are inviting his presence. And you know when you are making his presence impossible. Although you may leave this hall determined to serve the Savior tonight and thus invite the Spirit, some of you will be tempted by some thought like this: "Look, as long as you don't commit great sin, repentance isn't that hard. You just confess, take a little embarrassment, and you are clean again." That is a lie in at least two ways.

First, I have never forgotten the voice of Elder Tuttle after he read this description of suffering for sin from section 19 of the Doctrine and Covenants:

Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink. [D&C 19:18]

It was about there where I wrote these words, "Teach the people repentance hurts." I bear you my testimony that you must never believe the lie that there is no pain from sin. You can be forgiven. The Atonement is real. But President Kimball taught: "If a person hasn't suffered, he hasn't repented" (TSWK, p. 99). So, true faith in the Atonement of Jesus Christ, rather than leading you to try a little sin, will lead you to stay as far away from it as you can.

That brings me to a second falsehood. It is this: as the world grows more wicked, it is

only reasonable to expect to be overcome by temptation. That is not true either. We do not face so bleak a prospect. Here is what President George Albert Smith taught. He said it more than fifty years ago, but it is still true in our time, and will be in the future, however dark it becomes. He said:

There are two influences ever present in the world. One is constructive and elevating and comes from our Heavenly Father; and the other is destructive and debasing and comes from Lucifer. We have our agency and make our own choice in life subject to these unseen powers. There is a division line well defined that separates the Lord's territory from Lucifer's. If we live on the Lord's side of the line, Lucifer cannot come there to influence us, but if we cross the line into his territory, we are in his power. By keeping the commandments of the Lord we are safe on His side of the line, but if we disobey His teachings we voluntarily cross into the zone of temptation and invite the destruction that is ever present there. Knowing this, how anxious we should always be to live on the Lord's side of the line. [George Albert Smith, *Improvement Era*, May 1935, p. 278]

The increasing wickedness in the world should not make you more inclined to take chances but less. By choice of what you will do tonight, and what you won't do, you can place yourself in that territory where the Holy Ghost can be your companion.

How Do You Know?

Now you may feel that I have given you only modest hope. You and everyone want to know, to be sure—if possible, by some clear sign—that your sins are remitted. So do I. But you and I know that President Benson, in his article from which many of you have already home taught, was telling the truth when he said:

*For every Paul, for every Enos, and for every King Lamoni, there are hundreds and thousands of people who find the process of repentance much more subtle, much more imperceptible. Day by day they move closer to the Lord, little realizing they are building a godlike life. They live quiet lives of goodness, service, and commitment. They are like the Lamanites, who the Lord said "were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and they knew it not" (3 Nephi 9:20). ["A Mighty Change of Heart," *Ensign*, October 1989, p. 5]*

As if he knew my concern, and yours, to discern whether we were moving toward Christ, Elder Tuttle took me to a scripture. The reference is written in the margin next to the beginning of the fifteenth verse. Here is all it says: "Alma 5:14, 15, 26–31." And then these words, written very small: "Born again and retaining remission. How do you know?"

"How do you know?" That was whispered to me by a woman after a stake conference, with tears running down her cheeks, when she said: "I've tried so long. I've done everything I know how. Why don't I feel the peace of forgiveness? I want to feel forgiven. I want to feel clean again. I want to feel I can stay that way. How do I know?" It was asked in a letter that came to my desk recently. It was asked the other night on the phone in what began as a call about business. And with tears in his voice, a young man asked, "Well, how will I know? How do you know?"

Alma the high priest raised that very question, and he answered it as he taught the people in Zarahemla. Here is the reference, starting with Alma 5:14:

And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?

Do ye exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you? Do you look forward with an eye of faith, and view this mortal body raised in

immortality, and this corruption raised in incorruption, to stand before God to be judged according to the deeds which have been done in the mortal body? [Alma 5:14–15]

As Elder Tuttle read those words that day, I knew what I wanted. I wanted the Master's image in my countenance, perhaps not visible to others, but so that I might look forward with the eye of faith to that grand reunion. I wanted to have confidence that I would someday and somewhere hear the words: "Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth" (Alma 5:16).

Now, sometimes when you read scriptures, your mind may wander. In fact, I have been watching some of you. I realize I have been testing you. You have heard a lot of scripture. My mind didn't wander that day as Elder Tuttle moved over a page to read the twenty-sixth verse. I wanted to hear how I would know that the Atonement was working in my life. I wanted to know how to retain a remission of my sins. Here is what he began to read:

And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, if ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?

Have ye walked, keeping yourselves blameless before God? Could ye say, if ye were called to die at this time, within yourselves, that ye have been sufficiently humble? That your garments have been cleansed and made white through the blood of Christ, who will come to redeem his people from their sins?

Behold, are ye stripped of pride? I say unto you, if ye are not ye are not prepared to meet God. Behold ye must prepare quickly; for the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand, and such an one hath not eternal life.

Behold, I say, is there one among you who is not stripped of envy? I say unto you that such an one is not prepared; and I would that he should prepare

quickly, for the hour is close at hand, and he knoweth not when the time shall come; for such an one is not found guiltless.

And again I say unto you, is there one among you that doth make a mock of his brother, or that heapeth upon him persecutions?

Wo unto such an one, for he is not prepared, and the time is at hand that he must repent or he cannot be saved! [Alma 5:26–31]

Think of those words: Humble, stripped of pride, stripped of envy, not making a mock of my brother, garments cleansed. Have you experienced the change of heart?

I learned a long time ago that it is hard to know how you are doing in being born again and why it is not easy. Once, as a bishop of a ward, I worked with a young man not much older than many of you. He'd made great mistakes and had been moved by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ to make long and painful repentance. We were down to the weeks before he was to be married in the temple. I had long before forgiven him in the name of the Church and had given him his temple recommend. Yet he remembered that I had said, "The Lord will forgive you in his own time and in his own way." But now he was deeply concerned. He came to my office and he said: "You told me that the Lord would someday let me know that I was forgiven. But I am going to the temple to marry a wonderful girl. I want to be the best I can be for her. I need to know that I am forgiven. And I need to know now. Tell me how to find out." I said I would try.

He gave me a deadline. My memory is that it was within less than two weeks. Fortunately, I already had a trip scheduled. During that period of time I went to Salt Lake City, and there I found myself seeing Elder Spencer W. Kimball, then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, at a social function. It was crowded, and yet he somehow found me. He walked up to me in that crowd and said, "Hal, I

understand that you are now a bishop. Do you have anything you would like to ask me?"

I said that I did, but I didn't think that was the place to talk about it. He thought it was. It was an outdoor party. My memory is that we went behind a shrub and there had our interview. Without breaking confidences, as I have not with you, I outlined the concerns and the question of this young man in my ward. Then I asked Elder Kimball, "How can he get that revelation? How can he know whether his sins are remitted?"

I thought Elder Kimball would talk to me about fasting or prayer or listening for the still small voice. But he surprised me. Instead he said, "Tell me something about the young man."

I said, "What would you like to know?"

And then he began a series of the most simple questions. Some of the ones I remember were:

"Does he come to his priesthood meetings?"

I said, after a moment of thought, "Yes."

"Does he come early?"

"Yes."

"Does he sit down front?"

I thought for a moment and then realized, to my amazement, that he did.

"Does he home teach?"

"Yes."

"Does he go early in the month?"

"Yes, he does."

"Does he go more than once?"

"Yes."

I can't remember the other questions. But they were all like that—little things, simple acts of obedience, of submission. And for each question I was surprised that my answer was always yes. Yes, he wasn't just at all his meetings: he was early; he was smiling; he was there not only with his whole heart, but with the broken heart of a little child, as he was every time the Lord asked anything of him. And after I had said yes to each of his questions, Elder Kimball looked at me, paused,

and then very quietly said, "There is your revelation."

Sufficiently humble. Stripped of pride. Stripped of envy. Never making a mock of his brother.

When I went back to the young man and told him what I then knew, he accepted it. But he may have simply had to take my word for it. You see, it's hard to feel that you are sufficiently humble. If you did, you might not be. He went forward with his marriage. I've seen him since. To me he still looks as he did on the front bench before a priesthood meeting.

My guess is that he has retained a remission of his sins. I don't know if he knew then or if he knows now with the certainty he wanted, but I am sure of something. When that change of heart comes to me and to you, when we are cleansed and blameless before God, it will be because we have been made pure by the blood of Christ. And I know what I can and must do. I must be baptized by a servant of God holding the true priesthood, I must have received the gift of the Holy Ghost by that same power, and then I must have exercised faith in the Savior long enough and carefully enough that his grace will be sufficient for me. And I know at least one way to know that is happening in your life, or in mine. You will have put yourself so often in the Master's service, bringing the cleansing companionship of the Holy Ghost, that you will be on the front row, early, whenever and wherever the Master calls. It will be gradual enough that you may not notice. You will be humble enough that you may be reluctant to believe it is happening. But those with spiritual discernment who love you will know. And the Savior and our Heavenly Father will know. And that is enough.

Invite the Holy Ghost into Your Life

Here is another of those scriptures from Elder Tuttle, marked in the margin. It describes an evidence you and I can have that we are on the way to that better, higher life:

For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, 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. [Mosiah 3:19]

When I read that scripture I see the face of that young man on the front row, early to his meeting.

I bear you my testimony that you can invite the Holy Ghost into your life, and because you have been promised that gift by authorized servants of God, he will come. I bear testimony to you that you can be cleansed by the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. I bear testimony that the yearning you've felt for something better is a yearning to come unto Christ. And I bear testimony that this promise is true in the twenty-third verse of the nineteenth section of the Doctrine and Covenants: "Learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit, and you shall have peace in me."

I pray that you and I will make the choices tonight and tomorrow and as long as we live that will bring the influence of the Holy Ghost into our lives in the service of the Master. I testify that as we do, we will feel the cleansing that comes through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, and with it the confidence that we are coming unto him. And when we are there, with him and sanctified, we shall never hunger nor thirst again.

My hope is that you will put yourself in the way tonight where the Holy Ghost will go with you. A telephone call, a visit, or a letter you could write to someone God has asked you to serve would do that. I've promised you one miracle: you will feel the companionship of the Holy Ghost. But I have to warn you about expecting another miracle. Even with that help,

the help of the Holy Ghost, you may not say the words or give the service that will bring a mighty change in their lives. Remember that President McKay said that at "sometime" in their lives there is an irresistible desire to rise to a higher, more beautiful world.

That sometime may not be tonight. But go anyway. And go again. And then when the sometime comes, you will be there, and you will be their friend, and then you can testify to them that the longing they feel for something better is to come unto Christ. You can tell them how. And you will have been showing them how.

I have one other plea, one other hope for you: don't ignore the impulses that come to you to rise above yourself into a higher and more beautiful world. Growing up, getting educated, seeing the world, and almost everything that happens to you will push you toward saying to yourself: "Oh, that was just a dream. That's not possible. I could never change that much."

You can. The Savior promised: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

He can and he will. I bear you my testimony that God lives. He is your Father. You want to go home. You want to be with him. The only way you can be with him in the way you want to be is to become clean and spotless. I bear you my testimony that Jesus is the Christ. The Atonement is real. I bear you my testimony that the Holy Ghost will come to you in the service of our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ as you bear testimony.

I bear you my testimony that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God. I bear testimony that the priesthood is on the earth. The keys are here. President Benson is a prophet of God. I pray that you may without fear and with confidence go forward to serve. And I pray for this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.