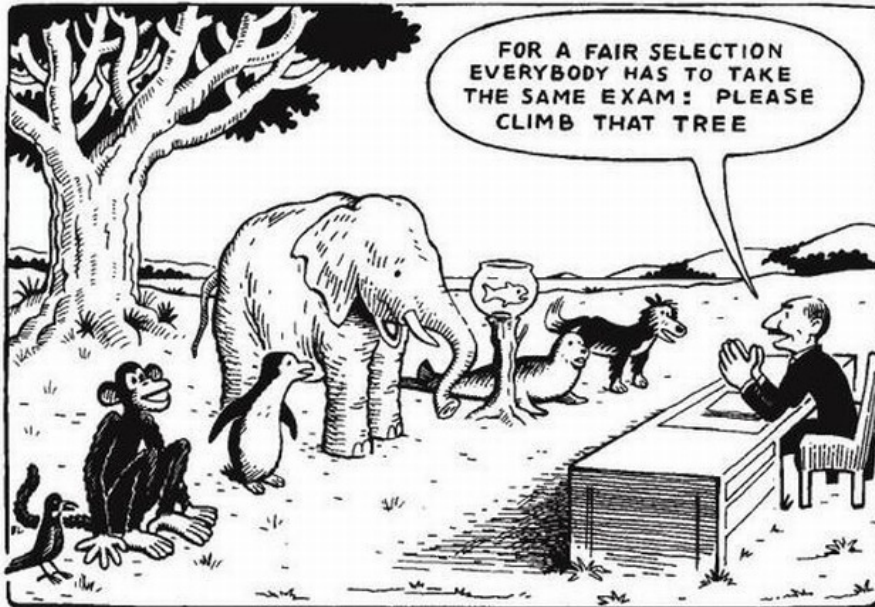


Tom's Psychological Condition Letter

January 1, 2015



The above cartoon addresses educational systems, but it could easily be transposed to church settings.

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, Concern for the One, April 2008 General Conference

Some are lost because they are different. They feel as though they don't belong. Perhaps because they are different, they find themselves slipping away from the flock. They may look, act, think, and speak differently than those around them and that sometimes causes them to assume they don't fit in. They conclude that they are not needed.

Tied to this misconception is the erroneous belief that all members of the Church should look, talk, and be alike. The Lord did not people the earth with a vibrant orchestra of personalities only to value the piccolos of the world. Every instrument is precious and adds to the complex beauty of the symphony. All of Heavenly Father's children are different in some degree, yet each has his own beautiful sound that adds depth and richness to the whole.

This variety of creation itself is a testament of how the Lord values all His children.

Alas, Elder Wirthlin passed away a few months after he expressed this compassion. His sentiment never took hold within the church and is now long-forgotten.

Karen,

I am not sure where to begin my story. But as a point of reference for which you can relate, I will start with an experience that I had with your kind husband Gary. About two years ago, I accepted an assignment to help in the nursery for a weeknight Relief Society dinner. I enjoy service opportunities for many reasons, including that these experiences provide some relief for my depression. Gary was also there.

Everything went well until the very end when there was some commotion in the cultural hall. Sister G had a severe allergic reaction to something she ate and was in distress. Gary alerted me, and we gave her a priesthood blessing. Someone also called an ambulance to take Sister G to the hospital emergency room. Gary also drove to the hospital to be with Sister G. I am unsure whether Gary was Sister G's home teacher, but I was favorably impressed that he would go the extra mile to help her. Fortunately, Sister G recovered from this episode, although she continues to have various health problems.

Now fast forward to the evening of Friday, October 18, 2013. Our ward was having an early Halloween party and dinner. Several elderly widows were there including Sister G. An overwhelming feeling came over me that one of our widows was on the verge of a medical emergency. Was this the prompting of the Holy Ghost? Or was it hypervigilance based on the previous experience with Sister G? Perhaps the premonition was some of both. I had no indication of which widow would have the emergency or what the exact nature would be. Well, the dinner went off without a hitch, and I disregarded my vigilant concerns.

What happened next is perhaps the most defining experience in my life because it typifies my recurring relationship with God, the church, and church leaders. Please understand that I have forgiveness for everyone, but I live in a state of depression, anxiety, PTSD and hypervigilance, with deep soul wounds. And I have a deep phobia of authority figures.

Yes, I realize that the atonement of Jesus Christ should provide healing, but this is problematic because these traumatic experiences continue to come by way of his anointed servants whom I must sustain in order to be temple-worthy.

I have had numerous experiences like the following one but will omit most of them for brevity.

On Sunday, October 20, the Sacrament portion of Sacrament meeting was about to begin. At that time and place, I saw something that no one else did. The congregation members had their eyes fixed on the hymnal or on the chorister or perhaps on the bishop. It has been my lot in life to see things differently than others, which has been a great source of misunderstanding. What I saw was a widow gasping for

air in a choir seat. Immediately, I had a flashback of my premonition two days earlier. I raced up to the stand and asked Sister R if she was ok. She exclaimed that she needed her daughter to bring the oxygen bottle from her car. I stood up, quickly scanned the congregation, but could not see the daughter. A flood of thoughts filled my head. One was that I might need to administer mouth-to-mouth resuscitation or CPR to Sister R. I felt that her life depended on me. So I did not want to leave her to go in search of her daughter.

I rapidly resolved to ask the ward members to help find the daughter so that the oxygen bottle could be brought to Sister R. I believed that every second counted and that there was not time to discuss the situation with the Bishop. So I went directly to the pulpit and effectively commandeered the meeting without any authority to do so. As I approached the pulpit, I had another premonition that was as strong as the first. i.e. I would face a terrible consequence for interrupting a sacred meeting regardless of how justified my actions were.

I was very dismayed that the congregation stared at me like deer in the headlights. But Brother S, who like me is somewhere on the autistic/Asperger's spectrum, jumped up to find the daughter who herself is on the "spectrum." As a curious aside, Sister R's life depended for a moment on the actions of three people on the spectrum. At this point, Brother T, who has emergency rescue training, came to help Sister R with the now retrieved oxygen bottle.

Sadly, the Bishop was upset by these events. He wanted us to take Sister R directly to the foyer. But she was not immediately stable for this move. We had to wait a few minutes until her breathing improved. There was an undertone of friction and tension between the Bishop and myself in this regard.

The Bishop had known that Sister R was "shaky" before the meeting began. But Sister R had insisted that she was well enough to play the organ. But Sister R had motioned to my wife to take her place at the organ prior to the Sacrament hymn. Sister R had then sat back in a choir seat and soon began gasping for air.

We then moved Sister R into the foyer and placed her lying down on a couch. In retrospect, I wish we had called an ambulance right away. But Brother T seemed confident that she would continue to recover by using the oxygen bottle. Furthermore, Sister R was very stubborn. She did not want the paramedics to come. And she did not want to go to the hospital. I had an emotional reaction of sorts because Sister R reminded me so much of my own ailing mother in Arizona. I made a firm declaration to Sister R that she was my mother and I was her son. She was very aggravated with me at the time. But now we warmly use these family terms to address one another at church.

After further consideration, Brother T and I reached a mutual decision to call an ambulance to transport Sister R to the hospital, largely against her will. As we accompanied her out of the building with her in the gurney, I confessed to the Bishop that I had probably broken every rule in the Church Handbook of Instruction by commandeering the Sacrament meeting. He made a remark that led me to believe that he appreciated what I had done and had no issues with me in this regard. I then drove to the hospital to stay with Sister R, following the example that Gary had set some months earlier. After a few hours of observation, Sister R was released from the hospital, but she continues to have health problems.

If this had been the end of the matter, then I would probably not have a meeting scheduled with you for psychotherapy. On second thought, I need to anyway.

The following Tuesday night, the Bishop called me into his office.

There is a saying that “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” I suppose that every experience and observation is likewise. Two people may experience the same interaction between one another in vastly different ways. And so it was...

From the Bishop’s point of view, I suppose he thought he was just calling me in for a “friendly chat.” For me I was on trial at Nuremberg where the Lord’s representative was prosecutor, judge, and jury.

I was still decompressing from helping Sister R at this point. I went into the meeting with a hypervigilant attitude knowing that I may be disciplined. Perhaps my attitude became a self-fulfilling prophesy. Or perhaps I had a premonition. Who knows?

The following is my perception of events. What really happened can only be determined before the presence of the Lord on the other side of the veil.

The Bishop had a very angry demeanor. I asked him why he was angry, but he denied that he was so. He told me how disappointed he was in me. He said that the Lord’s house was a house of order, and that I had failed to consider the needs of the other members because I was so hyperfocused on helping Sister R. He also rebuked me for resigning from stake calendaring position which we both agreed had become obsolete.

I felt a profound sense of rejection, as if I had laid a consecrated gift on the altar before the Lord (by helping Sister R), and that now he was now rejecting it via his anointed servant, the Bishop. I have felt this same feeling of rejection many times before and since, as though I was the poster child for “No good deed goes unpunished.”

I then had a meltdown before the Lord’s anointed servant. I am not proud of this.

I tried to get up and leave the room because I was so overwhelmed by grief.

What happened next is a matter of disagreement between the Bishop and me. But we both agree that he was sitting next to the door. As I attempted to leave, I gave him a gentle pat on his right shoulder assuring him that I would not go inactive from the church. I then perceived that he grabbed my right wrist and attempted to stop me from a leaving. I then broke his handhold and turned back toward him. He then insisted that I come back because he was not finished with me. The Bishop’s version is that he never grabbed my wrist. Only the Lord knows what really happened.

I re-entered the room but only because I felt intimidated by his authority.

I begged for mercy explaining that I was under a great deal of stress due to my mother’s dementia onset as well as by Jan’s health problems. Jan has fatalistic hypochondria justified by her family history. She even set me down about ten years ago and told me “goodbye” because she was dying from brain

cancer. We nearly live each day as if it is our last together. We have a very unusual marriage, but we love one another and stay together.

But the Bishop rejected my plea for mercy, as if so did the Lord. My pleas even seemed to enrage him further. Eventually, he let me go. Again, to the Bishop this was likely all just a “friendly chat.”

That night I could not sleep. I felt emotionally abused and a profound sense of rejection.

I regret the means by which I attempted to deal with the aftermath.

The first step was that I sought support from my Facebook friends. I wrote that I had tried to help someone at church but that one of my leaders objected. I did not mention the leader’s name or title. But all my Facebook friends who are ward members knew exactly what I was referring to. All but one were very sympathetic and reassuring. (More about him later). Even my Facebook friends who were not ward members were also sympathetic. These messages were very helpful, but I still felt very conflicted about what happened.

I also wrote the Facebook post as a way of gauging whether the ward members had been bothered by my actions in interrupting their sacred time of communion with the Lord. Apparently, none had.

At this point, the proper procedure would have been to go back to the Bishop and tell me that I did not feel right about what happened in his office. But I was far too traumatized for this. And I felt that he would become further angered.

Another solution would have been to go to the Stake President, but he is a stern authoritarian. And he would have told me to go read my scriptures. (More about each of these points later). So I had no confidence that I could resolve the situation by meeting with the Stake President.

My next action is something for which I could arguably be disfellowshipped or worse.

I told Jan that I was going to resolve the problem, but I did not tell her my plan.

I then went to the police to discuss whether the Bishop had committed a crime against me for unlawful detainment. The police officer agreed that a felony had occurred based on my account. I never intended to press charges and did not do so.

My real purpose for going to the police was so that I could then go back to the Bishop with a point of leverage so that we could discuss our previous meeting on an even playing field.

I then called the Bishop from the steps of the police office. Actually this was the Sherriff’s office because the ward building is on county rather than city property. The call lasted less than five minutes. The Bishop was very shocked. He vigorously denied that he had grabbed my wrist. But he was apologetic regardless. He begged that I not file charges. I then granted him the mercy which I wish he had given me.

At that point, I really wanted the matter to be over so that we could both get on with our lives.

I then called Jan to let her know that I had taken care of the problem. I was unable to tell her how I actually did this because she had an incoming call from someone. She did not tell me who, maybe because she did not recognize the caller ID number. Anyway she ended her call with me so that she could take the incoming call.

Guess who was calling her? The Bishop! The Bishop spent the next hour pouring out his heart and soul to my wife. He told her all about my call from the police office. Although I do not blame him, he was violating a trust by giving details about a confidential phone conversation to my wife, even before I could brief her. But I have no secrets. So I will give him a pass on that one.

Apparently Jan and the Bishop had a conversation about me prior to his meeting with me. Jan had warned him that I was sensitive and that he should go easy on me. He admitted to Jan that he did not follow her advice.

Jan then came to my work to pick me up to discuss the matter. She was annoyed by everything that happened.

But the story gets worse...

Soon thereafter, Jan and I went to a wedding reception for Brother B's daughter. Jan and I had volunteered to serve in the kitchen. Our help was not needed after all, so we simply stayed to socialize.

I then went to the reception line to shake Brother B's hand and congratulate him on his daughter's marriage. Brother B then pulled me to his chest to rebuke me for disrespecting the Bishop via my Facebook post. I again pleaded for mercy explaining that I have Asperger's and that I am very sensitive to certain issues. He then chastised me saying that this was no excuse and that I should not use my Asperger's as a crutch.

I felt very dejected. Between the Bishop's and Brother B's rebuke, I had no more place in the ward.

Brother B was also my family's home teacher at that time, although he seldom visited. I went home and sent him an Email releasing him from this calling.

Brother B then replied to me with an Email letting me know how frustrated he was toward me. He also expressed some consternation to Jan. He claimed that I had no authority to release him as our family's home teacher. No, I was not a priesthood authority, but I did have a right to determine who I would allow in my home.

(For some reason, the men of the ward often take their concerns about me to Jan.)

I then again made a regrettable choice of describing this latest incident on Facebook, although I did not give Brother B's name.

Both the Bishop and Brother B became aware of this post.

At this point, the Bishop and I had an Email exchange where he apologized and I forgave him. Offering forgiveness is a prerequisite to healing but does not guarantee it.

When I now see the Bishop, I have nightmarish flashbacks where I am back in his office being rebuked as I plead for mercy, with my offering rejected. I can no longer have a normal bishop-member relationship with him.

Brother B later came to me in person with a near-tearful apology. I forgave him and now have a good relationship with him, although my family now has different home teachers.

Perhaps if the Bishop would come to me in person with a similar heartfelt apology, then I might progress in healing. But perhaps I traumatized him as much as he traumatized me. If I understand correctly, he was emotionally abused by his mother growing up.

I have also experienced emotional abuse throughout my life, which has left me with PTSD, hypervigilance, etc.

Perhaps two people who have been so abused should never be in a relationship where one has superior authority over the other.

Alas, I have been a lightning rod for the wrath of many church authority figures.

Onto the next traumatic experience...

The LDS Church does not currently offer a Hebrew Book of Mormon due to a long-ago agreement with the Israeli government needed to allow the establishment of the BYU-Jerusalem Center. Yet, the Book of Mormon Title page twice states that it is intended for the Jews, among other peoples.

Consider the following:

And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.

Excerpt from Book of Mormon Title Page

Wherefore, the Jews shall be scattered among all nations; yea, and also Babylon shall be destroyed; wherefore, the Jews shall be scattered by other nations.

And after they have been scattered, and the Lord God hath scourged them by other nations for the space of many generations, yea, even down from generation to generation until they shall be persuaded to believe in Christ, the Son of God, and the atonement, which is infinite for all mankind-- and when that day shall come that they shall believe in Christ, and worship the Father in his name, with pure hearts and clean hands, and look not forward any more for another Messiah, then, at that time, the day will come that it must needs be expedient that they should believe these things.

2 Nephi 25:15-16

And as I spake concerning the convincing of the Jews, that Jesus is the very Christ . . .

2 Nephi 26:12

O ye Gentiles, have ye remembered the Jews, mine ancient covenant people?

2 Nephi 29:5

And it shall come to pass that the Jews shall have the words of the Nephites, and the Nephites shall have the words of the Jews; and the Nephites and the Jews shall have the words of the lost tribes of Israel; and the lost tribes of Israel shall have the words of the Nephites and the Jews.

2 Nephi 29:13

... all things which are hid must be revealed upon the house-tops.

Mormon 5:8

And behold, they (The Book of Mormon teachings) shall go unto the Jews; and for this intent shall they go -- that they may be persuaded that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; that the Father may bring about, through his most Beloved, his great and eternal purpose, in restoring the Jews, or all the house of Israel, to the land of their inheritance, which the Lord their God hath given them, unto the fulfilling of his covenant;

Mormon 5:14

For none can have power to bring it to light save it be given of him of God; for God wills that it shall be done with an eye single to his glory, or the welfare of the ancient and long dispersed covenant people of the Lord.

Mormon 8:15

... the stone that was cut out of the mountain without hands ...

Daniel 2:45

For the eternal purposes of the Lord shall roll on, until all his promises shall be fulfilled.

...and none can stay it...

Mormon 8:22,26

And if our plates had been sufficiently large, we should have written in Hebrew....

Mormon 9:33

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.

Psalms 137:5

And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews.

1 Corinthians 9:20

Wherefore, I must bring forth the fulness of my gospel from the Gentiles unto the house of Israel.

Doctrine & Covenants 14:10

And again, (seek diligently to turn) the hearts of the Jews unto the prophets, and the prophets unto the Jews; lest I come and smite the whole earth with a curse, and all flesh be consumed before me.

Doctrine & Covenants 98:17

We therefore ask thee to have mercy upon the children of Jacob, that Jerusalem, from this hour, may begin to be redeemed;

And the yoke of bondage may begin to be broken off from the house of David;

And the children of Judah may begin to return to the lands which thou didst give to Abraham, their father.

And may all the scattered remnants of Israel, who have been driven to the ends of the earth, come to a knowledge of the truth, believe in the Messiah, and be redeemed from oppression, and rejoice before thee.

Come, ye dispersed of Judah, Join in the theme and sing With harmony unceasing The praises of our King, Whose arm is now extended, On which the world may gaze, To gather up the righteous In these the latter days.

Come, All Ye Saints of Zion, LDS Hymn no. 38

Given these scriptures, given a charge in my patriarchal blessing, and given a sacred experience that I have had... I resolved to translate the Book of Mormon into Hebrew myself and post it in pdf form on one of my web pages. I have been posting the ongoing translation for the last seven years with no complaint from any Israeli or Jew. I have no plans to publish it in hardcopy format or to use it for active proselyting. I simply wanted to make it available for any Jew who was so inclined to find my web page and download the pdf document.

Here again, I have a different perspective than the main body of the church. Neurotypical members begin reading the Book of Mormon with "I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents..." But I begin my study with the title page and with its declaration that it was written for the Jews.

But the LDS Church is now clamping down on my efforts out of fear that it will lead to the closure of the BYU-Jerusalem Center. One of the Seventy contacted Stake President D in this regard.

I am enclosing a letter in Appendix A which I recently sent to my High Priest Group Leader and the Bishop in this regard, although I do not explicitly mention the translation.

My purpose for bringing this up is not to seek any affirmation or validation from you of my translating efforts, but is instead to inform you of my psychological condition. Again, I am faced with another situation in which I have laid my consecrated gift on the altar of the Lord only to have it rejected by his anointed servants.

I confessed psychological weaknesses in this letter. I had hoped that by so doing this letter would become an olive branch to the Bishop. If I could sense that he was genuinely sympathetic to me, my healing might progress. But he has not responded, and I cannot blame him. Perhaps I could never sympathize with someone who once reported me to the police.

Again, I have omitted other, similar experiences...

There are a few in the church who believe that each person must work out his or her own salvation directly with the Lord. There are others, perhaps the majority, who believe that we must work out our salvation by strict obedience to the Lord's anointed servants. Both sides can cite scripture and general authority quotes to support his or her position.

This is an authoritarian church, and I am psychologically unsuited for it. I have no more chance in this church than a cat in a dog obedience school.

I am trying my best to remain active regardless, but church can be a very painful experience for me.

Thank you,
Tom Irvine

APPENDIX A

Bishop ____, Brother ____,

Last Sunday after Sacrament meeting, President D called me in for what I am sure he regarded as just a "friendly chat."

The matter is unimportant, because if it had not been the one thing -- it would have been another.

(I have been called in for many of these "friendly chats" over the years. My perception in each case is that "No good deed goes unpunished." But this is only my perception, and I need to learn how to consider the viewpoints of others.)

I think that it is fair to say that President D has a very strict, authoritarian personality. That is just his personality, and I have no right to expect him to change.

On the other hand, I suffer from a long list of conditions, including depression, anxiety, insomnia, hypervigilance, PTSD, Asperger's syndrome, recurring memories of past abuse, etc.

I have had counseling in the past, and I am on SSRI medication.

Basically, I am a "basket case," although a very thoughtful one with a successful career.

I am suffering from other trials in my life. My mother in Arizona has the onset of dementia. This is very difficult for my siblings and me.

Back to President D, I am certain that he viewed his interview with me as a routine, love-based, friendly chat.

But for me it was nigh to a pre-excommunication hearing and an effective notice that I am on probation.

I think that in these situations, perception matters more than reality.

Anyway, I am effectively under surveillance. (Otherwise, President D would have never called me into his office.)

I cannot psychologically endure anymore of this drama.

My depression has actually propelled me to seek out service opportunities, but church leaders often take issue with my service. I do not need anyone to pat me on the back for service, but it is the negative-feedback which has been devastating to me.

I am apologetically asking to be released as a high priest instructor, a calling which I have enjoyed. Otherwise, I am afraid I may say something that might offend someone or cause further trouble for all concerned. By my own admission, some of my comments in past lessons have been tainted with my inability to harmonize with church authority figures.

I am willing to continue as a home teacher.

In parallel, I am going to again seek out counseling to learn to deal with my psychological disorders. I am pleased that Sister ___ is available for professional counseling. I look forward to working with her.

But otherwise, I need to keep a low profile.

Best wishes,

Tom Irvine