

Beginning at the End – Reason Down and Believe

Lawrence E. Corbridge
“Stand Forever” Episode 2

Reason Down and Believe

We may all be taken aback from time to time by the extraordinary, such as walking on water, multiplying bread and fish, raising the dead, translating gold plates with special lenses or a stone and hat, and the visitation of angels. Some people are hard-pressed to believe extraordinary things. While it is understandable that we may be challenged by the extraordinary, we shouldn't be, because ordinary things are actually far more phenomenal.

Hello, my name is Larry Corbridge. This is episode 2 of the *Stand Forever Series*. In the previous episode, we looked at the big picture, the primary framework for the series. It looks like this:

- A. The essential problem in life is separation from God Our Father.**
 - Without God, chaos, darkness, and death prevail.
- B. Jesus Christ bridges the gap if we will believe and follow Him to the end and help others do the same.**
 - He is the Way offsetting chaos, the Truth offsetting darkness, and the Life offsetting death.
- C. Therefore, cross the bridge and close the gap; Believe and follow Christ to the end and help others do the same.**

With this and the next episode, we begin at the end, with the conclusion of the entire series to make clear our destination: *believe and follow Christ to the end and help others do the same*. Today the focus is simply “believe.”

Patterns and Lessons

One of the most profound ways of learning is through the discovery of patterns in history and scripture. Two important patterns are that of a syllogism and Reason Down.

A syllogism is a form of deductive reasoning in which a conclusion is drawn from two related assertions or premises. The three parts of a syllogism are: A. the major premise, B. the minor premise and C. the conclusion. Here is an example of a syllogism:

- A. Smoking can cause cancer.
- B. I don't want to get cancer.
- C. Therefore, I won't smoke.

This framework for thinking and teaching is simple and powerful. The Lord often teaches this way. Rather than only telling us what we should do (C), He usually explains why and how (A+B), leading us to correct conclusions. For example, Doctrine and Covenants 14:7 is a syllogism. The Lord says:

- A. Eternal life is the greatest of the gifts of God. (That's the why.)
- B. If you keep my commandments and endure to the end, you shall have eternal life. (That's the how.)
- C. Therefore, keep God's commandments and endure to the end. (That's the conclusion, or, in other words, the what.)

The conclusion is often implicit, as in this instance, because it is so obvious that it goes without saying. The only reason not to reach the conclusion is if you disbelieve either of the two assertions (the why and the how). Otherwise, the only reasonable conclusion is to keep the commandments and endure to the end. The Lord usually does not tell us what to do without explaining why and how. (3:54)

In another example, Jesus said, "blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy"¹ rather than merely, say, "forgive one another." "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy," is a syllogism. It looks like this:

- A. I may be forgiven as I forgive others;
- B. I need to be forgiven;
- C. Therefore, I will forgive others.

Unless you can dispute either premise, there is only one logical conclusion—forgive. That's what great teachers do. They lead people to inescapable, correct conclusions. That's how Christ taught.

¹ Matthew 5:7

A final example spans the whole of King Benjamin's sermon:

- A. "(A)wake to a remembrance of the awful situation of those that have fallen into transgression (which includes everyone)."²
- B. "(T)he Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity ... cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men even through faith on his name."³
- C. Therefore, "if ye believe these things see that ye do them ... take heed that ye do not transgress that the name (of Christ) not be blotted out of your hearts."⁴

The Pattern of Greater Realities to Lesser Possibilities (i.e., Reason Down)

Understanding the pattern of syllogisms, let's now piece together an important syllogism threaded throughout scripture, which I call "Reason Down." If you understand Reason Down, not only will your faith be fortified but you will know that with God all things are possible, and nothing should be hard to believe.

On one occasion, Jesus was confronted by a father and his troubled son in the midst of a great multitude. The father said, "Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not." He went on to plead with the Lord saying: "if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, **Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.**"⁵

This is an interesting response from the father. He said he believed but feared it was insufficient. He hoped Christ could do something for his son long plagued with an unclean spirit ("if thou canst do anything"), but his greater cry was "help thou mine unbelief." He instinctively understood the dimension and hierarchy of life's various problems, including the suffering of his son, but few are more important than belief. It wasn't, "Yes, I believe, please help my son" but rather "I believe, help thou mine unbelief." He understood a connection between his belief and the healing outcome he hoped for his child. Good comes when you believe.

² Mosiah 2:40

³ Mosiah 3:5,9

⁴ Mosiah 4:10,11,15,16; 5:11

⁵ Mark 9:18-24

Then “Jesus ... rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose.”⁶

That is the end of that account. He healed the son, but did He respond to the father’s cry, “Help thou mine unbelief?” Yes, He did. **He healed the son and by so doing He strengthened the father’s belief as well.**

One of the most instructive and important patterns to be discovered in God’s dealings with His children, is that **He leads us to correct and almost inescapable conclusions by giving us phenomenal realities from which we may rightly conclude lesser things are possible.**

For example, when the resurrected Christ first appeared to His disciples, Thomas was not present. When they told Thomas what they had seen, he replied, “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.”⁷

“And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: *then* came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace *be* unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust *it* into my side: **and be not faithless, but believing.**”⁸

Jesus seems to have said to Thomas that he should “Be not faithless but believing” as a direct result of having touched His hands and side, rather than “Touch my hands and side, and by the way you should have had greater faith.”

The unsurpassed marvel and undeniable reality of the Resurrection for Thomas (and for the many others who personally saw with their own eyes and touched with their own hands) so far surpassed anything and everything else that could otherwise follow that nothing thereafter should have seemed incredible or challenged their belief. The magnitude of the Resurrection of Christ is so great that all else that could later possibly follow would pale by comparison.

In effect the Lord was saying: “You have both seen and touched me, therefore, you should be believing with respect to all else that will follow.” Except for the Atonement,

⁶ Mark 9:25-27

⁷ John 20:25

⁸ John 20:26-29, *emphasis added*

which was accomplished without mortal witness, the Resurrection was the crowning and most stunning achievement of Christ's ministry. If one died and rose again in bodily form, then anything else is possible. If the Resurrection is a reality, anything else is possible. Therefore, believe.

And not only the Resurrection, but the whole of the ministry of Jesus was filled with the miraculous, as no other before or since. He said His works testify of Him, and if people did not believe His words, they should have believed because of the greater and undeniable reality of the works they saw Him do. He said: "the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me.... If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father *is* in me, and I in him."⁹

In effect Jesus was saying, "What is more amazing, that the dead be raised to life and the blind receive their sight or that I doing those things am the Son of God? The greater, the more phenomenal occurrences, are the works I do. You have seen them. They are undeniable, beyond dispute. Why then can you not conclude from the greater realities, the lesser possibility that I am the Son of God?" (Not "lesser" in importance, but just in plausibility.)

There is a pattern in this to provide great realities that we might believe in lesser possibilities. God never asks us to extrapolate up, reason up, only down, from big to smaller. He never asks us to conclude from a lesser reality that bigger, greater things are possible. It always goes the other way. He asks us to only extrapolate or reason downward, not upward—Reason Down. He says, "take the far greater, the more phenomenal realities I give you (such as the Resurrection and His works) and reason down from there to believe that lesser things are also possible." (Again, lesser not in importance but in plausibility).

Jesus does not heal an earache and then say: "believe I may also raise the dead." Rather, He raises the dead and says, "I can heal your ear." He does not say: "your sins are forgiven" and then ask you to reason upward from there to believe that He can heal the sick or raise the dead. Rather, He heals the sick and raises the dead, then says, in effect: "Now in light of the greater realities that you have witnessed, also believe I am who (that) I am and your sins may be forgiven."

On another occasion, Jesus was presented with "a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus ... said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven

⁹ John 10:24-38, *emphasis added*

thee. And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This *man* blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, *Thy* sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? **But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins**, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house."¹⁰

On another occasion, Jesus said to His disciples about the death of Lazarus, "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there (to heal Lazarus), **to the intent ye may believe**."¹¹ When later He stands before the tomb of Lazarus, He will say in prayer: "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, **that they may believe** that thou hast sent me. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus come forth. And he that was dead came forth ... **Then many** of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, **believed** on him."¹²

Some get it and some don't. Some see the great undeniable realities and believe lesser things are possible as well. Others don't connect the dots.

The ninth chapter of John contains another compelling example of one who connected the dots. It tells of the phenomenal miracle Jesus performed giving sight to a man who was born blind. Everything the Lord did was phenomenal, but this episode is especially impressive because of the response of the man whose eyes were made to see for the first time in his life. When called upon to account for his sight, he simply explained: "He [Jesus] put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see." From that phenomenal reality, he "reasoned down" to believe that the man who gave him sight was of God. For him that was not difficult. Which is greater, that one born blind be made to see, or that the one who did it be of God?

"Now we know" he said, "that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing."¹³ He connected the dots. He understood; he reasoned down.

¹⁰ Matthew 9:1-7

¹¹ John 11:15, *emphasis added*

¹² John 11:42-45, *emphasis added*

¹³ John 9:1-33

That brings us to this important question: What about us, the millions who have not personally witnessed a resurrected being or angel, or the dead raised to life, or the blind made to see, manna fall from heaven, a bush that burns without being consumed, or the parting of the sea? Upon what reality, what great work do we base our faith? Where do we begin? What is the greater reality for us from which we may reasonably believe lesser things?

The *astounding* answer is **God gives to us, and we constantly witness realities far greater than the Resurrection or the miracles of Christ, and far, far more phenomenal than the visitation of angels.**

This leads us to this central point which is the primary assertion of the Reason Down syllogism: **The most phenomenal occurrences of all time and eternity, the most amazing wonders, the most astounding, awesome developments are the most common and widely recognized. They are also the very few facts that are undeniable, provable, beyond any question, dispute or doubt. While they are undeniable, they are also inexplicable. They are but we cannot explain them. These astounding realities simply are. They require no faith.**

The Most Phenomenal and Undeniable Realities

And what are the most phenomenal (amazing) and undeniable realities? I am. You are. We are. And all we perceive exists as well, from subatomic particles to the farthest reaches of the cosmos and everything in between. Is there any greater than those realities? No. Nothing else comes close. Not, nearly. Is there any fact or reality more provable or less deniable? No. You can deny neither your own existence nor the existence of all that surrounds you every day. And it all bears record of God.¹⁴ "All things denote there is a God."¹⁵

The big things are a given, that we may believe in smaller things. When we acknowledge the big things how can we not believe lesser things are possible?

Now we can fill in and modify the major premise a bit:

A. The most phenomenal occurrences of all time and eternity, the most amazing wonders, the most astounding, awesome developments are the facts that we exist and all that surrounds us exists. These few realities are the most common and

¹⁴ Moses 6:63

¹⁵ Alma 30:44

are also the very few facts that are undeniable, provable, beyond any question, any dispute, or doubt. While they are undeniable, they are also inexplicable. They ARE, but we cannot explain them. These astounding events, the facts of our existence, simply are. They require no faith.

Next, the minor premise:

B. Everything else that may be is less than what actually is.

You can't begin to imagine, much less describe, anything greater than what already is. All other events, developments, and occurrences are deniable, including miracles. They are subject to dispute but pale in comparison to the monumental, ordinary realities of what is. Miracles are far, far less phenomenal and rank much, much lower in magnitude on the scale of amazing things, than those few facts that are both indisputable and astronomically more amazing—the facts that we and all that surrounds us exist. In light of what is, nothing else should surprise us. It should be easy to believe that with God all things are possible.

Far, far more phenomenal than Resurrection, is birth. The greater wonder is not that life having once existed could come again, but that it ever exists at all.

Far more amazing than the dead being raised is that we live at all.

Far, far more amazing than the silent heart that beats again, is the heart that beats within your breast right now. The fact that it can beat again, pales in comparison to the reality that it ever beats at all.

That One could walk on water is not nearly as complicated, not nearly as amazing, as water and the Sea of Galilee in the first place. Which is greater, two parts of hydrogen attaching to one-part oxygen to form water, the Sea of Galilee and the planet that cradles it or One could walk on it?

Far less significant than the healing of the withered hand is the existence of the hand in the first place. If it exists, it follows it can certainly be fixed when it is broken. The greater event is not in its healing, but in its creation.

Far more amazing than the translation of gold plates are the hands, the mind and the heart that fashioned and inscribed them to begin with.

Which is greater, the sun that lights the noonday or that light may shine in your soul and grow brighter and brighter until the perfect day?¹⁶

Which is more phenomenal, that earth be populated with all kinds of animals/creatures, or they be preserved in a flood?

Which is greater, the power of a storm and the waves pounding the sides of a small boat and the planet upon which they all collide, or that One stand and say, "Peace be still" and wind and the waves obey Him?

That Joseph Smith could be a prophet is far, far less phenomenal than the undeniable reality of what he did.

Which is more phenomenal, the Liahona or a smart phone?

It is far more phenomenal that the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price exist than that they may be inspired of God.

That one could peer through a special lens or see on a stone the modern translation of ancient text written on plates of gold is far less amazing than the human eye. The wonder is not in what the human eye may see, rather the astounding wonder is that it sees anything at all.

Jesus said, "**Behold the fowls of the air:** for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; **yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?**"¹⁷ Which is the more phenomenal, that a sparrow exists or that existing, a sparrow would be counted and known to its Creator if it falls to the ground?

Which is the more phenomenal, that you exist or that existing, you would be counted and known to your Creator when you fall? The undeniable reality of your existence gives rise to the eminently reasonable conclusion that having created you, your Heavenly Father follows you and knows when you fall.

The greatest miracle of God may be the raising up of His posterity unto eternal life, to become even as He is. It is His work and His glory. It is also one of the most controversial and vehemently opposed doctrines of the restored gospel.

¹⁶ Doctrine and Covenants 50:24

¹⁷ Matthew 5:26

The Lord has said, "The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not; **nevertheless, the day shall come when you shall comprehend even God, being quickened in him and by him. Then shall ye know that ye have seen me**, that I am, and that I am the true light that is in you, and that you are in me; otherwise ye could not abound."¹⁸

How likely is that? How likely "the day shall come when you shall comprehend even God?"

And isn't this at least one instance of reasoning up, rather than down, to conclude that "as God now is, man may become"? Isn't that an exception to the rule of "Reason Down"? Surely going from mere weak and mortal man to the supernal splendor and grandeur of godliness is an example of going from the lesser (who we are) to the greater, (who God is) isn't it?

No. **Even that, the greatest of all possibilities, is less than the reality of what is.** And what is? I am and you are.

Far, far more amazing than man may become as his Maker, that a child may become as his parents, is the existence of the child to begin with. The far greater phenomenon is the existence of the child filled with intelligence in the first instance, not that the child, once existing, may advance and progress to the level of parents.

In light of the astounding reality of our existence, it is no stretch to believe we can move from one level of intelligence and achievement to the next and from there on to the next until we realize our full potential.

The truth is not nearly as fantastic or unbelievable as what the naturalists advocate. The truth is simple and clear: **Take the reality of your existence and believe you may become better.** That's it. That's the simple, profound truth. That is the simple and profound truth of your divine potential.

Improvement and advancement from one degree of light, intelligence, and capacity to the next and from there on to the next and so forth is commonplace, consistent with all our experience; it is to be expected. What or who is to say progress and improvement must stop? And when? At what point? And, why? Where in all our experience can we find offspring that cannot become as its parent?

¹⁸ Doctrine and Covenants 88:49-50

Why is it that people get so all hot and bothered by that? Why is that self-evident truth so hard for people to believe? It is because the truth about their potential requires change, and many prefer the darkness of denial over the brightness of their potential and the rigors of repentance.

All Things Are Possible

So, back to our syllogism:

A. The most phenomenal events (occurrences) of all time and eternity, the most amazing wonders, the most astounding, awesome developments are the facts that I am, you are, and all that surrounds us exists. These few realities are the most common and are also the very few facts that are absolutely undeniable and provable, beyond any question, any dispute or any doubt. While they are undeniable, they are also inexplicable. They are, but we cannot explain them. These astounding events, the facts of our existence, simply are; they require no faith.

B. Everything else that may be, is less than what actually is. All other events, developments, and occurrences, are deniable and subject to dispute, and pale in comparison to the monumental realities of our existence. Some of them we call “miracles.” Miracles are far, far less phenomenal and rank much, much lower in magnitude on the scale of amazing things, than those few facts that are both indisputable and astronomically more amazing. Miracles require faith. **What then is the conclusion? What do you say is the conclusion to be drawn from the foregoing propositions?**

C. Therefore, believe. Believe all things are possible. Be not faithless but believing. That which is, looms large over what may be and when the looming far greater realities are acknowledged, life requires little faith. In comparison to the few indisputable realities that are most amazing, little faith is required of all men to accept all the other lesser events and occurrences we label “miraculous.” In light of the indisputable realities, anything else is smaller and possible.

God gives us huge realities and invites us to believe that in light of what is, lesser things are also possible.

We don't need to see lesser things, to believe they are plausible, because the most phenomenal things we already see; the most amazing wonders, the most astounding, awesome developments are ours to behold all the time. It is all before us, all of us, all

the time. No one is favored. No one short-changed. We need no more. **Look around and believe.**