

## **"Keep Your Covenants and Your Covenants will Keep You"**

**Bruce C. and Marie K. Hafen** (both are descendants of Newell Knight)

**Joseph & Polly Knight Family Reunion, St. George, UT June 8, 2012**

BRUCE: We welcome the Knight Family Reunion to St. George and this historic Tabernacle. I attended Church here in my early years, along with Elder Jeffrey Holland. We were deacons together. As you look around tonight, you might enjoy Elder Holland's youthful memories: "During very lengthy sermons I would amuse myself by gazing about the building, admiring the prisoner craftsmanship. . . Did you know . . . that there are 184 clusters of grapes carved into the ceiling cornice of the building? (Some of those sermons were really long!) But most of all I enjoyed counting the window panes—2,244 of them—because I grew up on the story of Peter Neilson." [And that's a story worth knowing . . .] <sup>1</sup>

My own great-grandfather Samuel Knight, who spent his adult life here, is buried nearby in the Santa Clara cemetery. His step-mother, Lydia Knight, whose 200<sup>th</sup> birthday we celebrate this year, is buried in the St. George cemetery. Lydia spent the last seven years of her life working in the St. George Temple, a sketch of which adorns our reunion t-shirts this year. I wore that t-shirt recently in a local grocery store. The check-out clerk said, "So what college did you go to?" "College?" I wondered. He pointed at the t-shirt, then he looked closer and said, "Oh, no—it's not a university, it's the St. George Temple. I'm sorry!" "It's OK," I said. "It's for a family reunion. And the Temple is the greatest university anyway."

We begin with a brief Church historical perspective about the Knight family. Joseph and Polly Knight befriended Joseph Smith and his family in 1825, when 19-year old Joseph was still being tutored by Moroni before receiving the Book of Mormon plates. As Joseph Smith worked for the Knights, he formed lifelong friendships with Joseph and Polly's sons, who were close to his age. In 1826, Joseph told the Knight family about Moroni and "a gold book of ancient date" that he would soon receive. At first, some of the family didn't believe his story, but Joseph Knight believed him from the beginning.

By September 21, 1827, after four years of preparation, Joseph was ready to receive the plates from Moroni. Joseph Knight Sr. went to the Smith home that night. Joseph Smith and Emma left for Cumorah at midnight, borrowing Joseph Knight's horse and wagon to carry the plates. We love knowing that our Knight ancestors provided such concrete support for the work of the Restoration. The next morning, Joseph and Emma returned about breakfast time. In Richard Bushman's narrative, "After breakfast, Joseph called Joseph Knight into another room and, with the happy enthusiasm of a young man, told him that everything was "ten times better than I expected." He described the plates and the Urim and Thummim, saying "I can see anything; they are marvelous." And the plates "are written in characters, and I want them translated."<sup>2</sup>

Notice the high level of trust between these two Josephs. Joseph Knight also supplied some of the paper for translating the book, and he often visited Joseph to be sure he had enough to eat while translating. As one writer said, Joseph Knight “was always giving [to Joseph Smith] and expecting nothing in return.”<sup>3</sup> That attitude of generosity runs in the Knight family—but more about that later.

By 1830, Joseph Smith had found “little support [for his prophetic claims] from anyone outside his family. Only a handful of people valued his revelations at first: Martin Harris, Joseph Knight, Josiah Stowell, [and] Oliver Cowdery.” As the first converts joined the Church, they came one or two from a family and three or four from a city. But, as one of Joseph’s biographers wrote, “Belief in the Book of Mormon [also] spread along family lines. Not just brothers and sisters but cousins, in-laws, and uncles listened and believed. Five Whitmer children and three of their spouses were baptized in the first few months. Eleven Smiths, six Jollys, and five Rockwells joined in the same period. [But] *the most remarkable collection of kin was the offspring and relatives of Joseph Knight Sr. and his wife, Polly Peck Knight* [from] Colesville NY. Two of Polly Knight’s brothers and a sister, their spouses, and a sister-in-law accepted the Book of Mormon and were baptized. Seven of the Knight children joined, four of them with spouses, plus Joseph Knight’s sister Mary Knight Slade and five of her children. Twenty-one people came into the Church through the Knight-Peck connection in the first few months, forming the core of the Colesville branch. The Knights and the other four families accounted for sixty baptisms in the first nine months.”<sup>4</sup> Talk about “believing blood” ! What an extraordinary heritage, for all of us here tonight to stem from such a believing lineage.

Years later in Nauvoo, about two years before his death, Joseph Smith felt overwhelmed by persecution and harassment from the enemies of the Church. One day as he sought a better mood, he recorded in a special record the names of his most trusted friends--who had stood by him “in every hour of peril.” The first name he mentioned was “my aged and beloved brother Joseph Knight, Sr., who was among the first to administer to my necessities” in the work of the Restoration. “He has [ever] been faithful and true . . . never deviating to the right hand nor to the left. Behold he is a righteous man. May God Almighty lengthen out the old man's days; . . . [He is] a faithful man in Israel; therefore his name shall never be forgotten. There is his son Newel Knight, [and his other son] Joseph Knight Jr., whose names I record in the Book of the Law of the Lord, with unspeakable delight, for they are my friends.”

The deep bond of mutual trust between the Prophet and the Knight family suggests a theme for our remarks: *keep your covenants, and your covenants will keep you.*<sup>5</sup> In the School of the Prophets in Kirtland, Joseph Smith introduced a covenant of affectionate brotherhood among the early Saints, embedded in the context of their covenants with God: “Art thou a brother? I salute you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in remembrance of the everlasting covenant, in which covenant I receive you to

fellowship, in a determination that is fixed, immovable, and unchangeable, to be your friend and brother *through the grace of God* in the bonds of love, to walk in all the commandments of God blameless in thanksgiving forever and ever." (D&C 88:133)

This language, so reminiscent of Joseph's feelings for the Knights, suggests that our covenants with each other and with the Lord are primary sources of the Lord's grace. As we keep those covenants we receive His grace, for, as Nephi said, "We are saved by grace, after all we can do." (2N25:23) Or, as the Lord said elsewhere, "I am bound when ye do what I say, but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise." (D&C 82:10) In other words, grace isn't a free gift. We can access it only as we offer our own total consecration, to Him and to each other. As we keep our covenants to the utmost of our ability (think of the widow's mite), the Lord then responds with the blessings of grace—far beyond anything to which we might be "entitled" on some scale of equal weights. That is the reciprocity of grace: keep your covenants, and your covenants will keep you. That's what the Knight family did with and for Joseph Smith, and God's power always sustained them. Lydia Knight's life beautifully illustrates how these principles apply to each of us in our daily lives.

MARIE: Lydia began sustaining Joseph Smith's prophetic calling almost as soon as her foot touched the ground in Kirtland in 1835 as a 22 year-old, new convert desiring to gather with the Saints. Vincent Knight approached her, "Sister, the Prophet is in bondage, . . .and if you have any means to give, it will be a benefit to him." Vincent probably didn't know that Lydia had first heard the gospel from Joseph Smith personally a year earlier in Canada. Joseph taught her and another family for several days before baptizing them. He came to know Lydia's story, how she'd been married at 16, then abandoned by a deceitful husband, and her two small children had died. As he left her, Joseph had said he had been pacing and pondering her sorrow and loneliness. He said, "Sister Lydia, the Lord loves you and will overrule all your past sorrows and afflictions for good . . . Be comforted and let your heart rejoice, for the Lord has a great work for you to do. Be faithful and endure unto the end and all will be well."<sup>6</sup>

Against this background, Lydia instinctively replied to Vincent, "Oh yes, sir. Here is all I have. I only wish it was more." She emptied "her purse, containing perhaps fifty dollars, [into] his hand as she spoke."<sup>7</sup> Handing over *all* the money her parents had given her to travel and to begin her life respectably in Kirtland, left Lydia without means to buy even her own supper and night's lodging. Vincent used the money to free the prophet, then offered Lydia a place to stay with his family.

A few months later Lydia met Newel Knight--who had been called back from Missouri to help build the Kirtland temple--while they were both boarding with Hyrum and Jerusha Smith. Very soon attracted to each other--their friendship grew into love, and a civil marriage later that year. Lydia had first felt she couldn't marry Newel as long as her first husband Calvin Bailey was alive somewhere. After three days of

fasting and prayer, Newel asked Joseph Smith to seek direction from the Lord for them. Joseph prayed, then he told them the Lord approved of the marriage—for Lydia, a crucial spiritual answer. Then Joseph married them—the first marriage he had performed. Within a short time, Lydia learned that Calvin had died. From the day of their marriage forward, Lydia’s and Newel’s lives, together, demonstrated reciprocal covenant relationships between them, as husband and wife, and between each of them and the Lord.

In April 1836, after the temple’s dedication, Newel prepared to take his new bride to rejoin the extended Knight clan in the turmoil of Missouri. “Are you not in rather straightened circumstances?” Joseph Smith asked while talking with them about the Knights’ pending thousand-mile journey to Clay County. Newel, having received no pay for his work on the temple for more than a year, replied with understatement, “We are rather cramped.”

“Sister Lydia,” Joseph continued, “I have not forgotten how generously you helped me when I was in trouble.” The prophet left and then returned, handing the couple almost twice as much money as Lydia had given him.<sup>8</sup> Lydia’s earlier gift to Joseph, then Joseph’s increased gift to Lydia is a clear example of how Lydia’s keeping her covenants made it possible for her covenants to keep her—added upon by the generous multiplier of the Lord’s grace. Both Lydia’s gift and Joseph’s gift came not from a contract or a formal loan but as an act of true grace flowing from covenants of consecration, in both directions. That is how the blessings to and from the Lord and His servants always work.

After surviving the abysmal conditions and persecutions of Missouri, Lydia and Newel retreated with the Saints to Nauvoo, where again Newel was called to help build the temple. Once when Newel fell ill for two weeks, Lydia sent a message to their priesthood leaders, first to apologize for his absence and second to request “on behalf of my husband . . . whom I love and reverence, even as Sarah did Abraham” that they pray for him and that they consecrate a bottle of oil for him (which she sent with the letter).<sup>9</sup> They did as she asked, and he was healed.

Also in Nauvoo, Lydia was sick with malaria when many other Saints were also stricken. She asked Newell to take a white handkerchief to Joseph Smith, knowing that if he could bless it and return it to her, she would be well. But she only grew worse. Fearing death, she asked Newell to go see Joseph again. Newell explained that he hadn’t dared bother Joseph the first time because other Saints’ needs overwhelmed him. This time he went to Joseph, who blessed the handkerchief and assured him Lydia would recover—which she did. In these two incidents, Newel and Lydia’s faith and support for each other and their faithful covenant-keeping again gave them both access to the Lord’s grace.

Three months after their marriage was eternally sealed in the partially dedicated Nauvoo temple, Lydia and Newel, with their seven children, fled Illinois. After they crossed Iowa to Council Bluffs, Brigham Young sent the Knights with two companies of Saints north up the Missouri River in search of an alternate route west. The Saints accepted the kind invitation of the Ponca Indians to camp with them for the winter, hoping to continue west in the spring. One cold January night, Newel felt an acute pain in his side. No tried remedy brought relief. Through seven days and nights of excruciating anxiety, Lydia watched "the breath of the being she loved better than life itself slowly cease."<sup>10</sup>

"Lydia,' the dying voice faintly whispered, 'it is necessary for me to go. Joseph wants me [on the other side]. . . . Don't grieve too much, for you will be protected.'<sup>11</sup> 'Oh, Newel, . . . don't give up; oh I could not bear it. Think of me, Newel, here . . .with seven little children. . . . I cannot let you go.'<sup>12</sup> In agony he tried to hang on, and Lydia writhed in pain with him. But, not able to bear his pain any longer, Lydia knelt by his bedside, praying for forgiveness if she had asked amiss that Newel might remain, and she released her husband to God's will. Within moments his pain ceased; and his spirit went in peace.<sup>13</sup>

A month later, after an organization meeting for the trek west, Lydia wondered how she could possibly prepare her fatherless family for the journey--especially since she was expecting another baby. "Oh, Newel," she cried out, "why have you left me?!" "As she spoke, he [came to] her, a lovely smile on his face, saying, 'Be calm, let not sorrow overcome you. I was needed behind the veil . . . You cannot fully comprehend it now; but the time will come when you shall know why I left you and our little ones. Therefore, dry up your tears. Be patient, I will go before you and protect you in your journeyings. . . .although the ravens of the valley should feed you and your little ones you shall not perish for the want of bread.'<sup>14</sup> Ravens will feed you--a symbol of grace echoing back to the prophet Elijah.

Newel's visit was a direct fulfillment of Lydia's patriarchal blessing given to her by Joseph Smith, Sr. soon after she and Newel had married in Kirtland. That blessing affirmed to her that "the Lord has given thee a kind and loving companion for thy comfort . . . *your souls shall be knit together* and nothing shall be able to dissolve them: neither distresses nor death shall separate you . . ." The blessing continued, "Angels shall visit thee, and thy heart shall be comforted. . . ."<sup>15</sup> Note here that Father Smith assured them that death would not dissolve their bonds of marriage, even before the ordinance of eternal marriage was available. Note also the echo of this year's Knight Family Reunion theme: your hearts shall be knit together. A week after their baby was born, Lydia, now a single mother, cried out to Newel again as rain poured through her cabin roof, soaking the bedclothes. He came to her once more, repeating his promise of protection. Even in the drenched linens, "a pleasant warmth crept over her . . ."<sup>16</sup>

The reciprocity that lifted Lydia's and Newel's afflictions grew out of a relationship between two covenant-keeping people and their God--covenants made within the power of holy ordinances, and kept by them and Him through the demands of every day. "Grace shall be as your day." Relationships that are based on covenants embedded in ordinances are relationships that lift, and comfort, and strengthen, and sustain. The goodness of the reciprocity of this order grows until burdens become light, as in the kind of light that shines through the darkness and casts out all fear.

This kind of reciprocity exists among ALL of God's people, married or single, with or without children, who keep their covenants in honest faithfulness. In addition to the strength Newel brought Lydia from beyond the veil, Lydia was continually assisted through her years of single motherhood by both physical and spiritual service from priesthood brethren. Once the brethren erected a little house for her. Another time a gentlemen she didn't know told a miller to put up twenty pounds of flour for her. Later on, the brethren harvested her crop of wheat for her and her family. These are but samples of the human grace exchanged among the Lord's covenant-keeping people.

And once when Lydia's youngest son was snatched from a creek, she called for the elders to act upon their "commission" in the Lord's name. But it appeared to be too late: "there was no breath in him." She clutched little Hyrum to her chest and recalled the promise in her patriarchal blessing that her "heart [would] not be pained because of the loss of [her] children." The priesthood brethren felt the child was too far gone; a blessing would be useless. But, Lydia later wrote, "I could not be denied. They finally laid their hands on the lifeless child and prayed for him. Life returned and he began to breathe."<sup>17</sup>

Why did the Lord continually extend his grace to Lydia? Because, we believe, she worked continually to honor her covenants with Him. She sought constantly to give all she had to build His Kingdom--and His Kingdom is built to sustain her, and us. When she felt it was time in 1848 to begin her trek to Zion, she counseled with Brigham Young, who had returned to Winter Quarters for his family. He was . . . thoughtful about her circumstances and about the harsh conditions that awaited them in the valley. He reminded her, not only did she need enough provisions to get her family across the plains, she would need another year's worth of supplies in Utah to establish their crops. So he counseled her to remain in Winter Quarters "until she could find something to come to."

Then he gave her a faith-provoking suggestion: "If you feel so disposed, you can let your three yoke of oxen and two wagons go towards helping to fit out some one who can go and take care of themselves when there."<sup>18</sup> His words reminded Lydia of a covenant Newel had made earlier in Nauvoo to give all they possessed to assist the Saints who went west, a covenant never to cease their exertions until they had helped all safely to get to Zion. Because she regarded Newel's covenant as her covenant, she

unflinchingly responded as she had earlier when Joseph needed help: "Certainly, President Young, [my oxen and wagons] are at your disposal." As far as we know, Lydia was never compensated for her animals and wagons—but she hadn't offered them because she expected compensation. She knew the Lord would graciously provide for her family.

So Lydia lived near Winter Quarters for a year with her seven children in "a half-cave, half-hut on the bank of the creek"<sup>19</sup> which "flooded when it rained," was cold in the winter and stiflingly hot in the summer, and "impossible to make or keep, clean."<sup>20</sup> Susa Young Gates said this was one of the most miserable habitations in which a human being could have lived.<sup>21</sup> But as two students of Lydia's life wrote, "enough grief had already touched her life" that "she knew how to fit joy into the corners."<sup>22</sup>

When her own time came in 1850 to leave Winter Quarters for Zion, Lydia had to borrow money to rent the oxen she needed to complete her "fit out" for the journey, a debt she later repaid in Utah. Soon after she and her little brood reached Zion, the cow they had brought across the plains gave them their first milking from which they could make butter with a churn. After Lydia and her children counseled together, they decided to give their first pound of butter to the bishop for tithing. They weren't sure how much more butter the cow would give them, but they had learned always to pay the first tenth rather than the last tenth of anything the Lord gave them. After that, they were never without butter.

Lydia became the plural wife of a Brother Dalton in Salt Lake valley for five years. She later married a widower named James McClellan, feeling a special concern for his two motherless daughters. She then came with him to live in Santa Clara, where her step-son Samuel had been laboring for some time with Jacob Hamblin as a missionary to the Indians. After twenty years of marriage, Brother McClellan passed away, and Lydia was a widow once more. When the St. George Temple was dedicated in 1877, Brigham Young called her to be a temple ordinance worker, which she did until her death seven years later. She would sometimes ride to the temple at 8 a.m. in a "temple carriage" that picked her up from her home in St. George. She found that temple work was "so constant and pleasant that she could not feel lonely."<sup>23</sup> She found that in the temple, "eternity seemed only a footstep away."<sup>24</sup> She did the ordinance work for over 700 of her deceased family and friends. In 1884, while being visited by her daughter Lydia Knight Young, Lydia had breakfast, worked a day in the temple, and came home not feeling well. She lay down to rest, and soon took her own footstep into eternity.

**BRUCE:** The life of Lydia's son, Jesse Knight, vividly illustrates the principle that if we keep our covenants, our covenants will keep us. The priesthood power of those covenants reverberates not just between those who are physically in one another's presence, but also across time and space to both our posterity *and* to our ancestors.

Even though Jesse had come west with the wagon-train Saints as a child and had grown up with a mother of extraordinary faith, he was for years quite hostile toward the Church, sympathizing more with the Gentiles in Utah than with the Saints.

During Lydia's last visit to Jesse's home in Payson from her home in St. George, Jesse asked her, "Mother, how is it you are not preaching to me as you usually do?" She answered, "Jesse, I have prayed in the Temple for my children many times and on one occasion the Lord made known to me that I was not to worry about you any more, that you would one day understand . . . and see the Gospel for yourself . . . I never intend to argue again with you about religion."<sup>25</sup> And Jesse did come to "understand" and "see" the gospel for himself, though it took three more years and his oldest daughter's death to awaken his senses. Her name was Minnie. She died from poisoned well-water exactly when she knew she would--thirty days after she had offered the Lord her life in exchange for His restoring the life of her youngest sister, Jennie, who was, in the family's words, "the idol of the whole family." Little Jennie had been in the clutches of death due to the same bad water but was miraculously called back through the faith of her mother, who, Lydia-like, called for the elders despite Jesse's protest—he had thought it hypocritical for him to ask for a blessing, since he didn't really sustain the priesthood.

At that time, the older sister, Minnie, offered the Lord her own life as a sacrifice that her two-year-old sister might live. Minnie's breath left her as she prayed, "Oh God, bless our household." The combination of his baby's life and Minnie's death softened Jesse's heart and drew him toward God. When Jesse allowed himself to reverberate with the promises of his parents' covenants, the blessings extended far beyond the life of his own family. His later wealth from mining let him help assist the Church in paying some large, burdensome debts and to donate much of the land on which the BYU campus sits today. The humanities building on that campus now carries his name.<sup>26</sup>

The Jesse Knight part of Lydia's story illustrates an important doctrine about the power of sealing covenants made in the temple. If we keep the sealing covenants, how much will they keep not only us, but also our posterity? Apostle Orson F. Whitney once taught the "comforting doctrine" from Joseph Smith that "the eternal sealings of faithful parents would save not only themselves but their posterity. Though some of the sheep may wander, the eye of the Shepherd is upon them, and sooner or later they will feel the tentacles of Divine Providence reaching out after them and drawing them back to the fold."

Some anxious parents have interpreted this statement to mean that, either in this life or the next, the sealing power of Elijah will assure the eternal return of wayward children—regardless of how those children choose to exercise their agency. However, in a 2003 General Conference talk, President James E. Faust said that, "A principle in this statement [from Orson F. Whitney] that is often overlooked is that



[these children] must fully repent and . . . pay their debt to justice,” either in this life or beyond the veil. Mercy will not rob justice, and the sealing power of faithful parents will only claim wayward children upon the condition of their repentance and Christ’s Atonement. . . Perhaps in this life we are not given to fully understand how enduring the sealing cords of righteous parents are to their children. It may very well be that there are more helpful sources at work than we know.<sup>14</sup> I believe there is a strong familial pull as the influence of beloved ancestors continues with us from the other side of the veil.”

Let us apply these teachings to Jesse’s story. His parents, Newell and Lydia, had been sealed in the Nauvoo Temple. They were covenant keepers. Their entire lives attest that when we keep our covenants, our covenants keep us. For years, always filled with righteous desires for her posterity, Lydia had exhorted Jesse with what Lehi called “all the feeling of a tender parent.” (1N8:37) Virtually every parent here can identify with both those feelings and those exhortations. But, when she saw that her efforts only pushed Jesse away, Lydia took her desires to the Lord in His Temple—I can imagine not just once, but probably every day. Likely nothing else weighed more heavily on her heart than those desires—for Jesse and for the rest of her posterity.

And how did the Lord answer this anxious and tender parent? As she told Jesse, “The Lord made known to me [in the temple] that I was not to worry about you any more, that you would one day understand for yourself.” So “I never intend to argue again with you about religion.” Does this mean that Lydia gave up on him or stopped loving him? Of course not. Like Alma the elder, she pled with the Lord for HIS intervention of grace in her gifted son’s life, knowing she had done all she could do—by a lifetime of teaching him through her own example the blessings and the value of faithfully following Christ.

So the Lord came to Jesse—not only in answer to Lydia’s prayers, but to those of Jesse’s own wife and family. But even the Lord couldn’t have forced Jesse to submit. It’s not that He “won’t” help faithful parents, but that he “can’t” really override the agency of his own children—and not just because agency is a powerful law. God’s children *cannot* grow spiritually unless they are willing to participate to some degree in the process. Parents know that from trying to help their children learn to read, to swim, to work, and to learn any number of other skills. That’s why Elder Neal A. Maxwell once said that the only thing of real value we can give to the Lord is our own will; He already gave us everything else.

The very nature of the eternal plan is to help us grow and develop. When God asks us to participate and to sacrifice, He is inviting us to stretch our hearts to the point that we become more like Him. So we don’t ‘bargain’ with the Lord in making covenants—we just give Him all we have, holding nothing back, and he keeps his promises to us in his own way and in his own time, ultimately showering his truly

faithful Saints with whatever grace helps them most to grow. That's what happened with Lydia, and it's what happened with Jesse.

Jesse Knight got the Lord's message, and he took it fully to heart—after paying the high price of losing his child, then enduring his own self-chastening repentance. He came to feel so unhappy about his past life that he later calculated every dollar he should have paid as tithing during his years of inactivity—and he repaid it, with interest, to the Lord. No Church leader would have expected him to do that, but he wanted to do it. His hard-won commitment to keeping his own covenants motivated Jesse to guide every step of his business and personal affairs by seeking first the kingdom of heaven. He had consecrated his ample wealth to that Kingdom long before he ever earned most of it. He would have been nowhere near as resourceful and devoted in the Lord's service if he had just been trying to please his mother or to get her to stop bugging him about the Church. His own heart had to be in it—by his own choice.

This does not mean that his parents' sealing power had no influence on Jesse's life. On the contrary. Surely Newell's promise to Lydia that he would watch over their children was still in effect. And Lydia's prayers in the Temple clearly reached the ears of Him who said he "delights to honor those who serve him in righteousness and truth unto the end." (D&C 76:5) Thus her prayers had the same effect as did Alma's prayers for his son. The angel who came to young Alma said the Lord had sent him in direct answer to his father's prayers. Then, like young Alma, Jesse found in his hour of need that the teachings of his father and mother returned sharply to his memory—teachings he hadn't accepted when he first heard them. Of course, as we learn from Lehi's family, even when an angel comes to wayward children, that doesn't ensure lasting conversion.

Yet Jesse, for the rest of his life, "believed that his parents, even though dead, had some influence in directing his destiny," and that "the thing of greatest concern to them was that he always be faithful to the church." He made those concerns his own, feeling deeply that the Lord expected him to use his wealth one day to save the credit of the Church—which he later did. Incidentally, as just one example, President Heber J. Grant once asked Jesse for \$5,000 for a purpose Jesse didn't fully understand. President Grant suggested that he go home and pray about it. Jesse did so and returned with a check for \$10,000, saying to President Grant, "Next time I'll just pay what you ask without praying about it."

He also felt that the Lord had let him experience adversity in his family and elsewhere in his life for two reasons—first, to teach him the consequences of his own past carelessness, and second, to aid his own spiritual growth and development.<sup>27</sup> That's a key point—because of his willing participation in the Lord's invitation, he learned and grew into a spiritually mature person. Neither God nor Lydia Knight could have ensured that outcome simply by insisting on it. Only when Jesse began to keep his

covenants could the Lord's covenants with him and with his parents bless him. Even grace is reciprocal..

The blessings the Lord extended to Lydia Knight *do* flow by the power of her sealing and her covenants across time and space, to and through each of her ancestors, and to and through . . . her posterity-- *if* each one will choose for him or her self to live by the same faith and be sustained by the same grace-filled power. Somehow Lydia's faithful, covenant- keeping life draws her lineage that much closer to the purifying fire of the gospel where they can be sanctified by God's glory--*if* they will. And—*if* they will--they can "behold" that Christ "has engraven [us] upon the palms of His hands."<sup>28</sup>

We are grateful for Lydia's example on many levels. She knew that her relationship with God was based not on an equal worth contract, but on a covenant that offered her total consecration in exchange for a gift of far greater worth—the Lord's unlimited bounty and grace. And that is how her covenants kept her. She was like the widow in the Old Testament story of Elijah. After the Lord had saved both the widow's life and that of her child, the widow cried in gratitude, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me?" And Elijah answered, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, love him with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. O blessed are they who fear Him!"<sup>29</sup> The power of God's love surged into the widow's life because she loved God with all her soul. Her consecration for his grace.

MARIE: A poem by Vilate Raile describes the kind of energy Lydia Knight allowed the Lord to set in motion through her, and on through Jesse, and on through Minnie, and on, and on. It's entitled, simply, "Pioneers."

They cut desire into short lengths / And fed it to the hungry fires of courage.

Long after, when the flames died, / Molten gold gleamed in the ashes;/

They gathered it into bruised palms /And handed it to their children /And their children's children.

What is "it" they gathered? "Molten gold." Why molten gold? Isn't it a symbol of having the dross removed, of having been through covenant-keeping, backbreaking, mind-bending--and yet spirit-refining--fire? Yes. "Grace shall be as [our] day," and as one soul- stretched friend once put it, "grace is really hard work." As I understand the words of the poem, God's desires for them became their desires, and their courage. As the darkness of dross was removed from their desires, they had within them ever more gleaming light. As the Lord has said, "If your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light . . .and the days will come that you shall see him; for he will unveil his face unto you, . . ."<sup>30</sup> And the gleam of this gold is the doctrine that if we keep our covenants, our covenants will keep us.

My father is a great-great grandson of Newel and Lydia Knight named Ray Kartchner. I say this not to claim undeserved fame from pioneer ancestors, but to testify that no matter when a lineage joins this Church the blessings of the priesthood flow to God's temples and through the covenants we make there to lift, and comfort, and strengthen, and sustain our children and our children's children. I know this because I am one of Lydia's children. I have also been sustained by my own husband, whom I "love and reverence" *and* sustain. He is a great-great grandson of Newell and his first wife Sally. My father was raised by a mother whose hands were bruised somewhat as Lydia's were. With those hands *she*, my grandmother, led her family after her husband died when my father was two years old. By her pioneer-like example she continued to teach the pattern of covenant keeping to her children, and her children's children. Her son learned that pattern well, and he handed it to me with a gentle reverence that has made it easy for me to envision God as both the source of law and the source of love.

BRUCE: We testify that the Lord's covenants with us and ours with Him feed the "hungry fires of courage," melting our desires into ashes *and* gold. We pray that our children, and their children, will stay close enough to that fire to see the gleaming in the dust. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Debt You Owe," New Era, July 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling* (2005), pp. 59-60.

<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Keith, *BYU Devotional*, October, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> *Rough Stone Rolling*, p. 114.

<sup>5</sup> Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, "If we will keep our covenants, the covenants will keep us spiritually safe" (in *Conference Report*, Apr. 1987, 87; or *Ensign*, May 1987, 71).

<sup>6</sup> Susa Young Gates, *Lydia Knight History*, p. 23.

7. Susa Young Gates, *Lydia Knight History* [LKH], p. 25

8. P. 115, *JosKnight Family*, William Hartley

9. *JosKnight Fam*, Hartley 156

10. LKH 69

11. LKH 69

- 
12. LKH 70
  13. LKH 70
  14. LKH 72
  15. Patriarchal Blessing, April 3, 1836, Kirtland, Church Archives
  16. LKH 74-75
  17. Letters and Papers 28-29
  18. LKH 76
  19. LKH 77
  20. LKH 79
  - <sup>21</sup>. LKH 77.
  - <sup>22</sup> Jan Williams and LaRea Strebe, "Lydia Knight: 'God Rules' Was her Motto," *Ensign*, Aug. 1977
  - <sup>23</sup> LKH, p. 100.
  - <sup>24</sup> Williams and Strebe *Ensign* article
  25. J. William Knight, *The Jesse Knight Family* (1940), p. 33
  26. For a more complete story of Jesse's life, see Jeffrey Keith's excellent BYU Devotional talk from October 2001.
  - <sup>27</sup> J. William Knight, *The Jesse Knight Family* (1940), p. 37.
  28. 1 Nephi 21: 16
  - <sup>29</sup>. Felix Mendelssohn, *Elijah Oratorio*
  30. Sec. 88:67-68