When we think of the world around us we comprehend that some things have always been a certain way. We call these things natural. The sun rises and the sun sets every day. Water always flows downhill. Gravity works. Every living thing goes through a predictable path of growth, maturing, decline, and then dies. This process happens faster for some things and slower for others, but it is inevitable for everything we know about. So my question is this: is the gospel natural?

What is the gospel?

This is a fair question. What is the gospel? In one sense the gospel, the good news of Christ, is doctrine or teaching that Jesus is the Son of God, that he was born, lived a perfect life, paid for all our sins, was killed then resurrected, and has become the king and ruler of all mankind because of what he did while in mortality. In another sense, the gospel is the package of laws we call the plan of salvation.

The plan of salvation was what was presented to us by our Father in Heaven before the world was created. In its broadest sense it comprises all the laws that govern the universe, because those laws govern our use of agency, the laws that bring us blessings and punishments, the laws we refer to as the laws of nature, and all other laws that govern anything physical or spiritual in nature.

Using all these laws our Father is able to provide us with a Savior who can pay for our sins, provide us with a resurrection, a judgment, and a path to eternal glory and increase, and eventual godhood for those who obey the laws he gives us. Do we understand all these laws? Absolutely not! Do we know what all these laws are? No. For example, we don't know what the law is that allows for a resurrection. We know that at least one exists. We know that no one could be resurrected before Christ resurrected himself. We know that all of us will be resurrected, whether we resurrect ourselves or someone does it for us, we will all experience it. But we don't have the slightest clue as to how it is done.

There is only a very tiny set of laws we are even aware of in the universe, and those are the ones we have either discovered and figured out for ourselves or they have been

revealed to us through revelation to the prophets. The gospel encompasses all of the laws that govern our existence as God's children. We don't have to know and understand all of those laws in order to progress and return home to heaven. We just need to accept that there are laws that govern all things, and we need to work within the laws we know about, for we are only held accountable for those laws we know about.

What is natural?

Anything that is observable in nature is considered by the world to be natural. The rising and setting of the sun is natural because the laws that govern the running of the world around us are generally consistent and we see that it happens with such regularity that we just assume it will continue to happen. Through consistent observation we have learned to predict the weather. We see storm clouds gathering and experience has told us that rain is probably on its way. We see a funnel cloud and we automatically seek shelter.

When someone becomes sick we have learned that certain things can be done to help ease suffering from their cold or their flu. Some things we don't understand yet, and as such we tend to be very afraid of those things, because we don't know how to fix what is wrong. We used to have terrible diseases, like polio that killed and maimed millions of people all around the world. But the Lord revealed to someone a way to vaccinate people so they no longer had to worry about that illness. Millions of lives were made better because of this one small law that prevented great suffering. And it is a law that was revealed. Vaccinations make use of natural laws that were there all the time. We just didn't know about them until they were discovered. But now that we know there is a law that allows us to circumvent a disease, we can use that same law to help prevent other diseases as well.

Anything that governs the way things work in this world is what we call natural. But then that begs the question, what about things outside what is natural in this world? Can they be natural as well?

What is spiritual?

The realm of experience we call spiritual consists of all those things that are not physical. We can see the sun scoot across the sky every day, but we cannot see the Holy

Spirit move and work among us. We cannot hold in our hands a spiritual vaccination against the desire to break God's laws. Spiritual things are only perceived by thought and feeling. It isn't because they don't exist, but they don't exist in mortality in such a way that we can quantify and measure, compare and handle them. Even though they live, seemingly outside our realm of experience, these laws still exist, and they still govern our lives.

Have you noticed from the scriptures that Jesus, for example, is able to quantify and measure faith? How many times is he recorded as saying that someone has too little faith for something to happen, or sufficient faith for something to happen, or even the times when he said that never has there been seen so much faith among a certain people as that person had? We cannot see faith. We cannot measure it because it is not a natural thing in our mortal world. But does that disqualify it as being natural? God can obviously measure it and quantify it.

The Holy Ghost is able to tell when we are righteous enough to be ready and worthy of receiving certain knowledge. He also can see how much faith we have. He can also determine the amount of our understanding. That is definitely out of the realm of what is natural in mortality. Our term for such abilities is miraculous, for we cannot explain them. But does that mean they are magical? Are they unexplainable whims of a God? Does God, our Father operate on whims and magic or does He operate by laws?

What is prophecy and revelation?

I have a whole article written on prophecy. Prophecy is just a promise, not a guess. A promise is a guarantee about something that will happen in the future. To do this, God has to know the future, which He does. So when the prophets tell us that in the last days certain calamities will happen, they can only say that because God, who has seen and comprehended the end of our mortal existence before we ever began our mortal existence, has told the prophets what will happen. They are just passing along the message.

Prophetic utterances seem like they are unnatural, because we don't comprehend how someone can see, either mentally or physically, the future and know what is going to happen. This is why so many people don't believe the prophets. The events foretold to happen in prophecies often seem so far fetched as to be ridiculous. Who would have

thought that it was possible for the world to be covered by water and that every living thing on land would die? Yet that is what Noah told the people. And the truth and power of a prophecy is what they all learned the hard way by being on the wrong side of the gang plank of Noah's boat.

What about revelation? Is it natural? Are there laws governing revelation? We certainly don't have any books in the library listing the laws that control who gets to know what information from God, and under which circumstances. These laws belong to the spiritual realm, but they still govern all our communication with our Father in Heaven. Rest assured He who gave and set up those laws understands them and uses them to bless us and punish us.

We see the natural flow of spiritual laws at work all the time. What is the promise of Moroni about The Book of Mormon? He promises us as follows in Moroni 10:3-5:

> 3 Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts.
>
> 4 And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.
>
> 5 And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.

This is a law. The gist of the law is this - that if, in the wisdom of God, we receive these scriptures, we need to remember how merciful the Lord has been to us from Adam down to our day, and we need to ponder His mercies to us in our hearts. We then need to ask God with a sincere heart, really wanting to know if these things are true. His promise to us is that if we will do this God will reveal the truth about this book to us through the Holy Ghost. He then tells us something about the Holy Ghost that most people outside the Church don't know. He tells us that it is through the Holy Ghost that we can learn the truth of all things.

So the Holy Ghost has access to the law library of the universe. He is the keeper of the knowledge of God. If we want to know about anything having to do with things natural

on earth or things natural in the spiritual realm (or any other realm), we will receive it only through the Holy Ghost, for He is the testifier of truth. And that is the truth.

Is the gospel natural?

This brings me to my main point. When we are moved upon by the Holy Ghost when giving a blessing to say something or when we receive a prompting, a feeling, or thoughts during our prayers or scripture studies, are these natural laws at work? Do the commandments always make sense to us? Just as we are sometimes told to say something in a blessing that doesn't seem to make any sense, so too do some commandments seem to not make any sense.

The law of tithing tells me that the windows of heaven will open for me and pour out so many blessings that I cannot receive them all, if I will give ten percent of my increase to the Lord. Is that a rational thing to promise? In my article called The Secrets of Developing Spirituality in which I quote President Gordon B. Hinckley, he tells us three rules to gain spiritual knowledge. None of the three things he tells us to do logically produce what he promises will happen. But oddly enough, that is the "natural" result of doing those three things.

If we look at the things we are told to do all the time in the gospel so that certain blessings will be ours, almost without exception they will have at least some element about what we are to do that requires we exercise faith that the promised outcome will happen. The purpose of our mortal existence is to develop godly characters, which requires a great deal of faith, which is implicit trust in God. So all these laws are designed to require faith for the natural result of the law to unfold.

Look in your New Testament at the life of Christ. Does it make any sense to you that spitting in the dirt, making clay out of your spittle and anointing someone's eyes will bring them sight? Really? But Jesus wasn't doing magic. He was accessing natural spiritual laws that involved faith, which he could measure and perceive in that individual to produce sight. Every miracle in the New Testament is the same way. There are no unnatural events recorded in the scriptures. Laws govern all things and all behaviors in the world around us. As reported in the Old Testament, the sun doesn't take it upon itself to stand still for three hours of the day. And we learn in another book of scripture that the prophets were perfectly aware that the sun didn't stand still, the

earth went backwards to make the sun look like it was standing still. Only using natural laws of the universe could anyone do such a thing.

I say "natural laws of the universe" because God doesn't make up a law at the last minute to fix a situation he didn't see coming. He comprehends all things and has seen all needs and eventualities before he created anything. All laws were put in place before the universe was created so everything would operate within the laws that governed its existence. So yes, the gospel operates on natural law. Do we know how God made the earth go backwards for three hours? No, but he used existing laws to accomplish this task.

Final Thoughts

We are a doubting people. Our faith is often weak. Sometimes we need to remind ourselves that everything happens within the laws God set down before the creation of all things. There are no magic wands being waved behind a curtain to make things inexplicably happen or appear. All gospel laws, no matter how far fetched the promises are for what we need to do to obtain those promises, are as real and natural as the rising and setting of the sun. And they are all just as inevitable.

Our Father in Heaven only asks us to put a little faith in his love for us. If we are told from the Holy Ghost to take a left instead of a right, to say this or that, to promise a particular thing in a blessing, etc., we can do so with complete confidence, for the keeper of the knowledge of God, the Holy Ghost, will never tell us to do something that He cannot make come to pass in a very natural way.

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