I have come to believe that any of us can be spiritually as worthy as any Apostle. I used to think such a belief was presumptuous and arrogant, as though apostles had some corner on the market for spirituality. I have learned otherwise, and all because of a shift in my paradigm.

In order to talk about this subject I would like to introduce you to a friendly vocabulary word - the paradigm (para - dime). If you aren't yet familiar with the word paradigm, a paradigm is how you look at the world, and all the rules that goes with that outlook. If you change someone's paradigm, you change what is possible for that person to achieve in life. This is as true for religion as it is for business or personal accomplishment.

The important concept that accompanies our paradigm is the knowledge that paradigms are only perceptions, not facts. For example, some people believe there are laws of scarcity in this world. They believe everything in the world is limited, like the pieces of a pie. If you take a bigger piece of life's pie they believe that would leave less for others to have. This affects their view of everything in life from relationships to how many natural resources there are on the planet or in the universe. The interesting thing about these "laws" of scarcity is that they don't exist. Someone just made them up and taught them to others.

Those who live by the "laws" of scarcity are constantly fighting to grab as much for themselves as they can out of fear that someone else will get more than they do. Yet the Lord has told us we don't need to worry about there not being enough to go around. In Doctrine and Covenants 104:17-18 he says this.

> 17 For the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare; yea, I prepared all things, and have given unto the children of men to be agents unto themselves.
>
> 18 Therefore, if any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment.

The Lord, Himself has decreed and assured us that we don't need to worry about not having enough to go around. He made sure we were given a world to live on where

there was more than we could ever possibly need. If there is scarcity it is because there are those who believe the false idea that there is only a limited amount and they have to grab what they can before someone beats them to it. This is what causes scarcity. But that is the power of a paradigm, a perception, a way of looking at something.

Spiritual paradigms

From Adam's day until the restoration of Christ's Church in 1830 A.D., there have been few spiritual giants on the earth at a time. I am talking about relative numbers here. Only a few instances of whole civilizations of righteous people exist in our written record, and they were either removed from the earth, as in the case of the city of Enoch, or they eventually rejected truth and fell into wickedness and were destroyed, as in the case of the Nephites after the Savior's visit.

During the rest of the earth's history, we have record of only a handful of really righteous people at a time being in any culture that had the gospel. This perception comes from the written record, our scriptures. This creates in the minds of many the perception or paradigm that only the prophets can have revelation. Only the prophets were really righteous, because they seem to be the only ones the Lord dealt with directly. Others were good people, but most all of the revelation was reserved for the prophets. This causes a problem.

The fact of the matter is that there were those who had revelation, but we don't know any of the details of their righteous lives. Look at Nephi's brothers as an example. Joseph, Jacob, and Sam were all righteous men, but we have only a couple of sermons from Jacob recorded in the Book of Mormon. We know they followed Nephi and that they were visited by angels and heard the voice of the Lord, but our attention has been directed by Mormon to Nephi as the main figure, so we don't often focus on his righteous brothers. Don't get me wrong. I'm not complaining. I'm only pointing out that this creates in some of us a perception that only prophets can be really righteous. Only prophets can have revelation. Only prophets can be truly worthy of the Lord's approval. And this is just not true.

Problem with paradigms

The problem with a paradigm, or way of looking at our world, is that it colors every interaction, every assumption, and every expectation we have. Our paradigm either

limits what we can accomplish or it frees us to achieve more. Everything depends on which outlook on life we choose to live by. But if we have only been taught an outlook that hinders our spiritual progress, it becomes difficult to excel spiritually.

For example, if I believe that only prophets and apostles can receive revelation and live exemplary lives before the Lord then where does that leave me? How can I ever become like Christ if I am not called to be an Apostle? You see? If I have connected those two things in my head then in order for me to become as righteous, as approved before God as the apostles are, I would have to become one in order to get the Lord's approval.

Most of my life I have lived with this paradigm, which is full of contradictions. On the one hand we are told to become like Christ, to be good like him, to act like him, to love like him, but on the other hand, everything I see in the scriptures tells me that only prophets or the family members of prophets ever achieve these things. If people at large come close to this, like the people of Nephi after the Savior's visit, they only last a short time before they begin to reject the Savior's teachings and destroy themselves. This doesn't paint a healthy picture of our chances as one of the masses of being successful in becoming truly righteous people.

Paradigm shift

Fortunately, at some point in my life, the Lord helped me shift my focus and change my perception. One day the thought came to me, "If I can't be a prophet or an apostle, I don't see any reason why I couldn't become **as worthy as** a prophet or an apostle." This shift in my world view changed everything. There can only be one spokesman for the Lord at a time. There are only a handful of apostles alive at a time. There are only so many who can be called to be members of the Seventy, or the General Primary President, or General Relief Society President, etc. at a time. But there are an unlimited number of people who can be worthy of these callings at a time, even though most will never actually receive these callings. And that is okay.

I thought about how few there were in these callings then I thought, "Where do they come from?" and my eyes got big. Before someone is called to a high station in the Church they are just like anyone else in the Church. They are serving in their ward or stake, just like I am. Before someone is called to be a Relief Society President is she held and set aside as someone special who is unapproachable because she is going to be

called to a special position in the church? No. She is just doing what she feels is right, trying to live the commandments and be obedient. Then one day the Lord calls her to lead the sisters for a time in her ward. She struggles to live up to the requirements of the new calling then when she is released she goes back to being just one of the many sisters in the ward.

This sister who was made a Relief Society President had lived as worthily as anyone else who became a Relief Society President, and a multitude of women who never received the calling of Relief Society President. Those who are worthy to be called to high positions in the Church live all over the place. Have you noticed that when the Brethren call a new General Young Women's Presidency or any other kind of general presidency, they are only in that calling for a few years then they are released and others are called. Those who are released usually just go back to their wards and stakes and pick up where they left off in their service.

When it comes to choosing those for high and holy callings in the Church, the Brethren have tens of thousands of worthy people from which to choose. They can pick people from many countries. All these people have lived worthy lives before the Lord. They have all learned to receive personal revelation. They have all demonstrated their righteous desires before the Lord. Whether or not they are ever called to a high position in mortality, they have lived worthy of those callings. The Lord does not judge us by the callings we receive, but by our individual worthiness.

That shift in my paradigm has made all the difference in my life. I no longer labor under the delusion that I have to be an apostle to be as worthy as one. Don't get me wrong, I don't think I am. What has changed is my belief that I am now capable of becoming as worthy as any Bishop, Stake President, or Apostle, without having to become one by calling. I now see that all of us are capable of spiritual greatness, whether or not there is a public calling that goes with that greatness.

Any of us can serve with humility, like the Savior. Any of us can love others, like the Savior. Any of us can receive answers to our prayers, like the Savior. The callings we receive will all be different, for the Lord will call us as He sees fit. He, and He alone knows what we have been set apart to do in mortality. He will call us to do whatever is most needed for our personal development and for the salvation of others.

Never in the history of the world have there been so many righteous people on the earth at one time, at least as far as we know. Never has there been so many temple covenant makers and temple covenant keepers as there are now. With covenants comes revelation. With covenants comes spiritual power. Each of us needs to seriously think about what perceptions rule our life. Do our perceptions, our paradigms hamper our growth in the gospel or do they set us free to achieve great spiritual growth.

Peter taught us in 1 Peter 2:9 this concept:

> 9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

We are capable, and not only capable, but expected to act like a chosen generation, a peculiar people of the Lord, a precious possession. The Lord has commanded his prophet to teach us to minister more as Christ did. President Russell M. Nelson taught us that ministering is a higher and holier way of caring for each other. Any of us can achieve spiritual greatness by the choices we make. None of us have to hold a particular calling in order to become righteous or be acceptable to God. The positions we hold in the Church in no way change His love for us. Nor does our calling in the Church change how righteous we are or can be. Our ability to receive revelation and to love as Christ loves is based solely on our personal spiritual progress.

When it comes to our spiritual possibilities there is no scarcity. There are no limits placed on what we can achieve in our relationship with our Father in Heaven. This should be our paradigm, that God looks only on our heart and at our behavior. His love is perfect, and He doesn't care what position we serve in or how long we serve. All He cares about is that we do as we have covenanted to do and we seek Him out each and every day of our lives.

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The Importance of Being "As Worthy As"