
THE WORD OF WISDOM FORMULA

An Introduction

Tom had two major concerns about his health. Carpal tunnel syndrome affected his hands and wrists so much that the pain and numbness often kept him from being able to do his taxidermy work. He also had low back pain that had plagued him for 30 years as the result of a skiing accident. The past ten years had been especially bad, and his back would "go out" at least weekly. Sometimes he would end up in bed for several days. He had been to numerous medical doctors and chiropractors for relief but was told that he would eventually end up in a wheelchair because of his injury.

Eventually, Tom was able to heal both his carpal tunnel syndrome and his back pain by applying the health principles he learned in the Word of Wisdom. Today he can do his taxidermy, shovel wet snow, or do heavy lifting without any pain in his hands or lower back, and it's all because of the Word of Wisdom. These principles have great power to heal, prevent illness and disease, and promote spiritual and physical well-being. They are

powerful because they are revealed truths from Heavenly Father. They can help you improve your health and heal yourself.

I have asked this question of many people, "What do we need to do to receive the health promises contained in the Word of Wisdom?" The typical response is, "We need to stay away from tea, coffee, tobacco, alcohol and illegal drugs." In fact, close to 100% of respondents will answer with something similar. I will then ask if there is more. "Is there anything else we need to do to receive those promised blessings?" The response is usually a little slower in coming. The person might add, "We need to watch our diet," or "We need to stay away from caffeine," or he might make a statement like, "There needs to be moderation in all things." Occasionally a person might even say, "We should eat meat sparingly."

About 50% of respondents in this informal survey recognize there is something additional about diet we should follow in order to receive the promised blessings, and they have some idea of what those nutritional recommendations are. The remaining 50% either don't know that

History of the Word of Wisdom

"When (the brethren) assembled together in this room after breakfast, the first they did was to light their pipes, and, while smoking, talk about the great things of the kingdom, and spit all over the room, and as soon as the pipe was out of their mouths a large chew of tobacco would then be taken. Often when the Prophet [Joseph Smith] entered the room to give the school instructions he would find himself in a cloud of tobacco smoke. This, and the complaints of his wife at having to clean so filthy a floor, made the Prophet think upon the matter, and he inquired of the Lord relating to the conduct of the Elders in using tobacco, and the revelation known as the Word of Wisdom was the result of his inquiry." (Young, 1869)

the Word of Wisdom talks about nutrition, or if they do know, they don't know what it says.

I will then ask them one last question, "*Is there anything else we need to do to receive the health promises contained in the Word of Wisdom?*" A few individuals hazard a guess, but virtually 0% can come up with the third requirement that allows us to receive the blessings of health promised in the Word of Wisdom.

Most members of the church primarily view keeping the Word of Wisdom as a necessary requirement to be a worthy member in good standing, to advance in the priesthood, or to hold a temple recommend. They see it only secondarily as a means to good health. However, for those wanting to receive the full health benefits offered in the Word of Wisdom, it is imperative to realize there is more required than only abstaining from addictive substances like tea, coffee, tobacco, and alcohol.

THE 3 PRINCIPLES OF SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL HEALTH

There are three general principles that the Lord expects us to follow in order to receive the promised health blessings. The principles are found in the first half of verse 18 of Doctrine and Covenants 89, with the blessings following.

18 And all saints who remember to KEEP and DO these sayings, walking in OBEDIENCE to the commandments, shall receive...

If we look carefully at this first half of the verse, we see the three principles we must adhere to:

- 1. Remember to KEEP these sayings.**
- 2. Remember to DO these sayings.**
- 3. Walk in OBEDIENCE to the commandments.**

"Keep" and "do" imply different things. When we talk about *keeping* the Word of Wisdom, we generally think of the things we abstain from. We'll call these the "*don'ts*." When we are asked in a temple recommend interview if we "*keep the Word*

of *Wisdom*," it is generally understood to mean that we abstain from tea, coffee, tobacco, and alcohol. We "don't" use them.

But what does it mean to "*DO these sayings*"? Elder LeGrande Richards taught, "*Much emphasis has been placed—and rightly so—on the don'ts of the Lord's law of health, the Word of Wisdom. Adherence to the prohibitions of this commandment helps one avoid taking harmful substances into his body. However, verses 10 through 16 of this revelation give some positive guidelines for maintaining strong, healthy bodies. Let us look now at some of these do's*" (Richards 1950). Elder Richards continues by discussing the important nutritional concepts of the Word of Wisdom, calling them the "*do's*." The do's are of such tremendous importance to our health and well-being that we will discuss them in great detail throughout this book. The Lord gave us this information because He knows what we need to *do* to be healthy. Therefore, there is great wisdom in *doing* what He says.

The third principle required of us, while we *keep the don'ts* and *do the do's*, is to *walk in obedience to the commandments*. Elder Ezra T. Benson, who was ordained the twentieth apostle early in this dispensation in 1846, gave some excellent insight on what the Word of Wisdom meant to him and to many of the early members at the beginning of the Church.

"When we first heard the revelation upon the Word of Wisdom many of us thought it consisted merely in our drinking tea and coffee, but it is not only using tea and coffee and our tobacco and whiskey, but it is every other evil which is calculated to contaminate this people. The Word of Wisdom implies to cease from adultery, to cease from all manner of excesses, and from all kinds of wickedness and abomination that are common amongst this generation—it is, strictly speaking, keeping the commandments of God, and living by every word that proceedeth from His mouth.

*"This is the way that I understand the Word of Wisdom, consequently we have to keep **all** the commandments, if I understand the matter correctly, in connection with this Word of Wisdom, in order to obtain the blessings, for unless we do keep the commandments of God, and not offend in any one point, we have not a full claim upon the blessings promised in connection*

with this portion of the word of the Lord" (Benson, Ezra T. 1855). From what this early apostle said, it is apparent that walking in obedience to the commandments is an important requirement for receiving *all* the blessings promised us, both temporally and spiritually.

In more recent times, this was attested to by President N. Eldon Tanner. He said, *"You will note that the Lord says 'walking in obedience to the commandments,' which would include all the commandments"* (Tanner 1972, emphasis retained from original). Just abstaining from coffee, tea, tobacco, and alcohol isn't enough to be fully living the Word of Wisdom. There is so much more to it. Amazing improvements in health and well-being occur when we implement all of the principles taught in the Word of Wisdom. The Word of Wisdom is not just about what we don't use or consume. It is also about what we do consume and how we use its principles to deal with situations and emotions. It's an all-encompassing principle with promises of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health.

Sleep and Exercise

There are two principles to good health that are not mentioned in the Word of Wisdom – adequate sleep and physical exercise. Although exercise is not mentioned in the scriptures, the importance of sleep is stated in another revelation. *"...cease to sleep longer than is needful; retire to thy bed early, that ye may not be weary; arise early, that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated"* (D&C 88:124). Church leaders have also commented on their importance.

President Thomas S. Monson taught, *"Nutritious meals, regular exercise, and appropriate sleep are necessary for a strong body"* (Monson 2008).

Elder Richard G. Scott declared their importance to good spiritual health, *"...spiritual communication can be enhanced by good health practices. Exercise, reasonable amounts of sleep, and good eating habits increase our capacity to receive and understand revelation"* (Scott 2012).

THE 3 PRINCIPLES IN REAL LIFE

So how does this apply to us in real life? Let's return to Tom who had carpal tunnel syndrome and chronic low back pain and see how he applied these three principles of the Word of Wisdom to overcome his symptoms.

Tom was a coffee drinker. He cut way back on his coffee and at the same time increased his consumption of fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods as indicated in the do's of the Word of Wisdom. Within a month his hands were back to normal. Sometimes he had flare-ups of his carpal tunnel symptoms and realized that coffee was still the major cause of those flare-ups. He continued to cut back on coffee until his flare-ups ended completely. Although he wasn't perfect at *keeping the don'ts* and *doing the do's*, he learned to follow those principles closely enough that his carpal tunnel syndrome became a thing of the past.

Tom's low back was a different story. His symptoms did not change despite a change in diet. His back kept going out, and he had frequent episodes severe enough to keep him in bed for days at a time. Most of these episodes he related to lifting something too heavy or straining too hard. One day he was sitting at the kitchen table with his siblings discussing their elderly mother's deteriorating health. Tom felt she should be put in an assisted living facility where some of her needs could be more easily met. She had the necessary money in a savings account, and he felt it was a good way for her to spend it. A couple of Tom's siblings disagreed and felt she would be better off staying at home.

The discussion became heated, and Tom started to get mad. He could see that his siblings were more concerned about their mother spending "their" inheritance than they were about what was best for her. As the conversation progressed, Tom could feel his back getting tighter and tighter. The tension in the room increased, tempers began to flare, and Tom's back tightened even more. Suddenly, he felt a stabbing pain in his back shooting down his leg. His back had gone out even though he had not been doing anything physically strenuous. He was only sitting at the kitchen table.

Tom realized at that moment that it was not what he was doing physically that caused his back to go out; it was what he was thinking and feeling and the stress of the situation. As he reflected on other times his back had gone out, it all began to make sense to him. He could see how emotional stress was a major cause of the instability and chronic pain in his lower back.

Tom decided he needed to work on how he responded to life and learn how to *not* react with anger, or fear, or worry, or guilt. In terms of the third principle of the Word of Wisdom, he needed to *walk in obedience to the commandments* by being more tolerant, compassionate, kind, patient, and forgiving. He needed to have more faith in God and be less judgmental of others. It was not an easy journey because he had to change long-established responses to life situations. He needed to forgive and let go of things. The good news is he was able to do it and it worked. It has been many months since he has had any pain at all in his back.

These three principles of the Word of Wisdom are powerful because they work! In 21 short verses Joseph Smith gives us the most inspiring and enlightening document ever written on how to have good spiritual and temporal health. It is powerful because it is revealed truth from Heavenly Father and not just the opinion of men. His wisdom far surpasses our own. He knew way back in 1833 that we would need this wisdom to deal with the challenges of our times and the great blessings it would bring into our lives.

THE PROMISED BLESSINGS

What are the promised blessings available in this remarkable revelation? They are found in verses 18-21.

18 ... shall receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones.

19 And shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures.

20 And shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint.

21 And I, the Lord, give unto them a promise, that the destroying angel shall pass by them, as the children of Israel, and not slay them. Amen.

Some of these blessings are temporal and some are spiritual. The heading to section 89 says, "*Obedience to gospel law, including the Word of Wisdom, brings **temporal and spiritual blessings.***"

President Ezra Taft Benson expounded on these two types of blessings, emphasizing the greater importance of the spiritual ones,

"The temporal promise for obedience is: 'They shall receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones; ... [they] shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint.' (D&C 89:18.20)

*"I have always felt, however, that the greater blessing of obedience to the Word of Wisdom and all other commandments is spiritual. Listen to the spiritual promise: 'All saints who remember to keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience **to the commandments** ... shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures.'* (D&C 89:18-19.)

*"Some have thought this promise was contingent on just keeping the provisions of the Word of Wisdom. But you will notice we must walk in obedience to **all** the commandments. Then we shall receive specific spiritual promises. This means we must obey the law of tithing, keep the Sabbath day holy, keep morally clean and chaste, and obey all other commandments. When we do all this, the promise is: They 'shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures'"* (D&C 89:19) (Benson, Ezra Taft 1983, emphasis retained from the original).

The final promise, "*... that the destroying angel shall pass by them... and not slay them...*" (D&C 89:21), is also both a temporal and spiritual promise. Elder Rudger Clawson commented on the temporal part of this blessing. He said that the Lord "*...will bless (his people) and he will preserve them and carry them along until they shall have fulfilled the measure of their creation and accomplished their work, if they will observe to keep and do these sayings and render obedience to his law*" (Clawson 1920). In other words, by obeying the Word of

Wisdom, we will not experience a physical death before our time.

President Boyd K. Packer pointed out the spiritual aspect of this promise. "... *if we walk in obedience to these commandments... there is spiritual death which you need not suffer. If you are obedient, that spiritual death will pass over you, for 'Christ our passover is sacrificed for us,' the revelation teaches (1 Cor. 5:7)*" (Packer 1996).

The temporal and spiritual blessings we receive by obeying all the principles of the Word of Wisdom are remarkable! Better physical health, greater wisdom and knowledge, and the destroying angel to pass us by are promised blessings worth striving for.

THE WORD OF WISDOM FORMULA

The Word of Wisdom is a simple, yet profound formula that blesses us with a clear and precise understanding of how to obtain temporal and spiritual health and well-being. Receiving all the promises possible is contingent upon obeying all three principles of *keeping the don'ts, doing the do's and obeying the commandments*. Our willingness and ability to keep these principles, as well as the blessings we receive, *vary* according to our understanding, desires, and faith. How we apply these three principles in our lives determines the blessings we receive. The principles and promises of the Word of Wisdom are *variables* just like in a mathematical formula.

In mathematics or science a formula is a rule or statement written in algebraic symbols. For example, the formula to calculate the perimeter of a rectangle is: $(2 \times L) + (2 \times W) = P$. Here, L = length, W = width and P = perimeter. These three letters are all *variables* and change with the size of the rectangle being measured. So if L=5 and W=3, then P=16. If the length and width are larger numbers, then the perimeter of the rectangle will be larger too.

The Word of Wisdom Formula for receiving promised blessings looks like this:

THE WORD OF WISDOM FORMULA

KEEP THE DON'TS	+	DO THE DO'S	+	OBEDIENCE TO COMMANDMENTS	=	PROMISED BLESSINGS
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OR

VARIABLE K	+	VARIABLE D	+	VARIABLE O	=	VARIABLE P
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Here, *K* = *keeping the don'ts*, *D* = *doing the do's*, *O* = *obedience to the commandments*, and *P* = *promised blessings*. The degree of blessings we receive on the right side of the formula varies according to our degree of understanding and compliance with the variables on the left. The good news is that many members of the Church receive the promised blessings of the Word of Wisdom with or without even knowing its qualifications. They abstain from harmful substances, eat well and keep the commandments, so the Lord blesses them automatically.

The bad news is there are many members who do not have the spiritual or temporal health they would like, and they frequently wonder why. Often, they *keep the don'ts* and expect to receive the blessings of health but don't realize there are more variables to the formula. Many times they think there is nothing they can do to improve, that they are victims of genetics or environment, or that they are destined to have the problems they do. They may even wonder if there is something wrong with them that keeps the Lord from blessing them.

Invariably, if they make an improvement in living one of the variables on the left side of the Word of Wisdom Formula, they see their spiritual and physical health improve. Positive changes in another variable may bring even more blessings. When they understand the law, they can better understand how to receive the blessings. In D&C 130:20-21 we read:

20 There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated.

21 And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.

Elder A. Theodore Tuttle says, this verse "... sets forth unmistakably the fact that there are principles upon which promises are predicated, and that obedience is the key to receiving blessings" (Tuttle 1978).

The better we understand and live the Lord's Law of Health, the greater the likelihood we will receive the promised spiritual and temporal blessings. The greater our knowledge, desire, and capacity are to *keep the don'ts, do the do's, and obey the commandments*, then the greater our faith and confidence can be that Heavenly Father will bless us with His promised blessings.

A PERSONAL JOURNEY

In 1979 my wife, Debi, and I understood the *don'ts* of the Word of Wisdom and lived by that principle. Like most members, that was basically all we knew about it. Then we had an experience that gave us new insight and a much greater appreciation for the Lord's Law of Health.

Shortly after we began chiropractic college, Debi broke out in a rash all over her body. We took her into the clinic at the college to see if we could get some help. Several interns looked at her and offered a variety of diagnoses. A doctor happened to be visiting the school that day, and someone invited him into the room to get his opinion. He looked at Debi and said, "*You have a toxic liver. Eat three grapefruits a day for three days, and you will be fine.*"

We were startled at his diagnosis of toxic liver. What does a liver have to do with a skin rash? What does it mean to be toxic? We didn't understand what the doctor was talking about. However, we did understand "*eat three grapefruits a day for three days,*" so that is what Debi did. In three days her rash was gone, and it never returned. That was our introduction to nutrition and to the concept that the food we eat has a significant impact on our bodies. What we eat does make a difference!

As a result of this experience, I began a serious study of nutrition and its impact on health. It soon became apparent that

there was a great deal of conflicting information on nutrition (a fact that still exists more than thirty years later). I needed a guideline so I could compare the things I was learning to a standard that was true. Without that guideline, I wouldn't know how to interpret the contradictory information I encountered.

Many years ago, I attended a two day seminar on nutrition that I expected would extol the virtues of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. I was surprised when scientific study after scientific study was projected on the screen showing the importance of consuming large amounts of protein. According to the presenter, one should be eating meat three times a day. Was his presentation with its supporting science correct? Was it really the way to eat in order to be healthy? Without a standard to go by, how could I know?

Because of my faith and my testimony in the restored gospel, I turned to the Word of Wisdom for answers. This revelation became a standard to guide me through a jungle of nutritional information. In eight short verses the Lord outlines nutritional principles, that if adhered to, bring promised blessings of health. These verses quickly became my guiding light to determine what is and what is not beneficial for us to consume.

However, I soon learned that there was even more to the Word of Wisdom than the don'ts and the do's. Patients, like Tom with his back problem, were able to heal and get well when they dealt with the stresses of life by "*walking in obedience to the commandments.*" Miracles occurred when gospel principles like forgiveness were applied.

For more than 30 years this Word of Wisdom Formula has served me well personally, in my family, and in a clinical setting. I have learned that those who follow it, no matter what the current trends, fads, or science may say, are much more likely to retain or regain their health.

THE WORD OF WISDOM SOLUTION

If you suffer from fatigue, chronic pain, blood sugar problems, overweight, high blood pressure, inability to sleep, depression or numerous other ailments or conditions and want to "*have health in the navel and marrow in the bones...and run and*

not be weary and walk and not faint" (D&C 89: 18, 20), then the principles contained in the Word of Wisdom are the solution.

If you want “...*wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures*” (D&C 89:19), specifically in relation to health concerns you may have, then my hope is that this book will enlighten you and encourage you in your efforts to seek personal revelation to solve these concerns.

President Ezra Taft Benson taught, “*The Word of Wisdom allows us to know that the Lord is vitally concerned about the health of His Saints. He has graciously given us counsel for improving our health, endurance, and resistance to many diseases*” (Benson, Ezra Taft 1983).

President Boyd K. Packer added, “*The Word of Wisdom does not promise you perfect health, but it teaches how to keep the body you were born with in the best condition and your mind alert to delicate spiritual promptings*” (Packer 1996).

The counsel of these two apostles is the framework for this book. By following the Word of Wisdom more closely, you can improve your health, endurance, and resistance to disease. You can know how to keep your body in its best condition and most importantly, keep your mind alert to spiritual promptings. What wonderful and remarkable promises are yours as you give heed to this marvelous revelation!

This book is divided into three parts according to the three principles that you need to follow to receive the promised blessings. Remember to look at these principles as *variables* to remind you that your willingness and ability to keep these principles, as well as the blessings you receive, *vary* according to your application, understanding, desires, and faith.

PART 1 VARIABLE K = KEEPING THE DON'TS.

PART 2 VARIABLE D = DOING THE DO'S.

**PART 3 VARIABLE O = OBEDIENCE TO THE
COMMANDMENTS.**

As you better align yourself with these three variables, your health will improve and you will receive more temporal and spiritual blessings in your life.