

The variety of genres is another pleasure of this collection. There are personal essays, informational essays, experimental essays, sermons, stories, poems, a play (not surprisingly, by Eric Samuelsen), and three drawings titled “Three Grand Keys,” with text explaining in three different languages how to tell if an otherworldly visitor is an angel, a just man made perfect, or the devil appearing as an angel of light. Carter has done an extraordinary job of weaving all these genres together so that in turning to the next piece, the reader is surprised and has to adjust expectations for how the narrative will develop.

As Carter says in the introduction, being confronted with death “brings us squarely into the present,” and only in the face of death are we “so intimately connected to life, so unburdened and unsupported by the past and future.” There are such a variety of responses to death that each reader will find some pieces to fit and others to challenge his or her paradigm of what happens at death, of how the dead interact with the living, and of how we create meaning in or come to an acceptance of this mortal experience that ultimately awaits us all.



A Life Worth Living

George B. Handley. *Learning to Like Life: A Tribute to Lowell Bennion*. Self-Published, CreateSpace, 2017. 122 pp. Paper: \$12.99. ISBN: 9781975992699.

Reviewed by Zach Hutchins

The highest achievement for a volume of *Festschrift* is to prompt readers to revisit the life and teachings of that individual in whose honor it has

been composed and move them to act in furtherance of the honoree's legacy. Handley's slim collection of essays, whose proceeds benefit the Birch Creek Service Ranch inspired by Lowell Bennion's ranch in the Teton Valley, accomplishes both tasks. Before I began reading this book, I knew of Bennion only anecdotally, as an author of lesson manuals for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But as I read *Learning to Like Life*, I found myself searching bookstores for copies of Bennion's books and printing off Birch Creek application forms. Handley's essays capture the worldview of a man whose life and teachings were radical with respect to twentieth-century values in precisely the same way that New Testament Christians were considered radicals by their contemporaries.

Handley begins the book with an anecdote that sets the tone for his meditations on the life and legacy of Lowell Bennion. Describing Bennion's death in 1996, Handley recalls that

President Gordon B. Hinckley, the President of the LDS church at the time and [Bennion's] former neighbor, commented at his funeral that he had seen a lot of cars in the church parking lot that day that Lowell Bennion would have never driven. . . . [Bennion] was not afraid to suggest that people ought not to own homes and cars that were too big and too expensive because he knew how much these things distract us from our deeper purposes. (9)

Like the first followers of Jesus, who left their nets and material possessions straightway, the Bennion remembered by Handley is a man who cared more for the kingdom than his career. His many acts of service included running the Boys Ranch every summer for more than twenty years, where he conversed and played and worked side-by-side with hundreds of young men, inviting each to the labor of self-actualization.

Fittingly, given his funereal tribute, Handley's book is organized around a series of aphorisms reminiscent of those in President Hinckley's bestselling *Way to Be!: 9 Rules for Living the Good Life*. All but one of Bennion's aphorisms begin with the same three words: "Learn to like." Those words express a belief in the malleability of the human soul, a

belief that we can educate our desires and cultivate a love for the finest things in life. Such a perspective is fundamental to Mormon theology, and although Bennion's aphorisms "do not explicitly mention Christ or his atonement, they do describe the transformative power of partnering our desires with God so as to 'learn to like' what is higher, better, and more worthy of our affections" (107).

In keeping with those paradoxes fundamental to Christianity, Bennion found what is "higher, better, and more worthy" in thrift, simplicity, and sweat. His aphorisms endorse the pursuit of:

what doesn't cost much;
 conversation;
 plain food, plain service, plain cooking;
 fields, trees, brooks, hiking, rowing, climbing hills;
 work;
 the song of birds; and
 gardening, puttering around the house, and fixing things. (11)

Bennion's aphorisms urge the use and appreciation of that which we already possess or have access to, rather than the acquisition of more. His rejection of consumerism and *haute cuisine*, as well as an attitude of indifference to technology, should register as bracingly radical for many Americans, but Handley encourages his readers to embrace this embodied, measured, industrious approach to life.

In amplifying Bennion's aphorisms, Handley both speaks to the philosophical underpinnings of each directive and offers practical suggestions for "learning to like" the simple things of life. For example, in his discussion of fields, trees, and brooks, Handley suggests that contemplating nature reveals "how strange and unnecessary beauty really is, as strange and unnecessary as love or grace or forgiveness and mercy. And when we see them unnecessary but nevertheless real, we see them as gifts of a Giver" (54–55). Interspersed with his lyrical celebration of landscapes and similarly profound passages are more pragmatic exhortations, encouraging the reader to avoid "walking on treadmills on a

perfectly beautiful day” (47). Handley is at his best and most compelling when he delves into the theological rationale for Bennion’s beliefs.

Occasionally, Handley wanders fairly far afield from Bennion’s aphorisms. His exegesis of the directive to “Learn to like what doesn’t cost much,” for example, lingers on a desire for social justice whose connections to Bennion’s directive is tangential and tenuous. Bennion, he writes, “never limited his service to people of his own faith or to those in his own circles. His commitment was to broaden his circles however and whenever he could. I suppose the alternative is to risk believing that the world consists of people in the conditions of those most immediately around us. There is poverty in such an imagination” (18). These are beautiful sentiments, artfully expressed; their relation to “what doesn’t cost much” remains, for me, unclear. If, here and elsewhere, Handley strays from the task at hand, his wanderings are, at least, worthwhile ventures.

Learning to Like Life is an easy book to like. And for those like me, who never knew Lowell Bennion, Handley’s book does the important service of turning our minds and hearts to his consecrated life and wise teachings—both are worth revisiting.



The Gift of Language

Heidi Naylor. *Revolver*. Salt Lake City: BCC Press, 2018. 190 pp. Paper: \$9.95. ISBN: 9781948218009.

Reviewed by Michael Andrew Ellis

The stories in Heidi Naylor’s short story collection *Revolver* present characters who have experienced regret, grief, loss, and even death. As