

Draw Near unto Me through Obedience

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My dear sisters here and around the world, what a joy it is to meet with you united in spirit to learn how we draw nearer to our Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ.

We have heard tonight how we may do this through prayer and the use of the scriptures. We have also been reminded that as we partake of the sacrament each Sunday our minds and our hearts should be filled with our commitment to “remember him and keep his commandments.” (D&C 20:77.) As we further listen to that prayer, we hear the promise “that they may always have his Spirit to be with them.” (D&C 20:77.)

From the very beginning, God has taught his children that blessings come to those who are obedient. As He gave those special rules on Mount Sinai for the guidance of Israel, the Lord stated that He would *show mercy* to them that kept His commandments. (See Ex. 20:6.) In Deuteronomy we are told that “the Lord commanded us ... *for our good always.*” (Deut. 6:24; italics added.)

King Benjamin, giving his farewell address after a long life of service and experience, said, “If ye do keep his commandments he doth bless you.” (Mosiah 2:22.)

Each of us can gain a sense of inner confidence and peace when we obey gospel principles.

Several years ago, our newly married daughter and her husband began a series of moves from one place to another—graduate school, first job, and so on. These moves took them to various parts of the country. In each place the climate and soil conditions were different, but they determined they would follow the prophet’s advice and have a garden. Their first attempts at gardening were pathetic. The weeds grew much better than the vegetables. The gardens were “obedience gardens.” However, with continued effort, each year the gardens improved. They learned new techniques and developed skills. As children came to their family, each was taught to work and take responsibility in those “obedience gardens.” Now their gardens are attractive, worthwhile “survival” projects, as the family enjoys and shares the produce. They preserve the excess for later use. Besides the practical lessons they learned, they found peace and assurance in keeping the commandments. Surely the promise was fulfilled for them: the prophet’s advice had been for their good always.

Sometimes we think that because our circumstances are difficult, it is not practical to keep all the Lord’s commandments. There are those, for instance, who feel they cannot afford to pay tithing. But as we obey the commandments, we have the evidence of blessings, feelings of accomplishment, and inner peace.

One dear sister and her husband who recently joined the Church had a home that was simply a wooden shell with no bathroom facilities, oven, or sink. Because of their very low income, they could not afford to feed their eight-year-old son, who had to live with his grandparents. This young couple found tithing a very difficult principle to obey.

After being a member of the Church for five months, the young mother decided that she was going to keep the commandment of tithing. In order to do so, she gave all the money she had in her home to the bishop in the middle of the month, then wondered what would become of her, her husband, and their three-year-old daughter

during the remaining fifteen days. They had no money saved, and very little food.

“The windows of heaven” as described in Malachi 3:10 [Mal. 3:10] did open. That week a kind Relief Society sister brought fresh bread, their country’s staple food. In addition, an overdue debt was paid to the husband, and just three months later he received a substantial pay promotion in his work.

Heavenly Father truly looked after their needs as they exercised great faith to be obedient.

In 1 Nephi we read, “If it so be that the children of men keep the commandments of God he doth nourish them, and strengthen them, and provide means whereby they can accomplish the thing which he has commanded them.” (1 Ne. 17:3.)

Again, listen to the words of King Benjamin: “I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true.” (Mosiah 2:41.)

Obedience brings blessings here and now. Jesus said, “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye *do* them.” (John 13:17; italics added.) Happiness and peace are found when we are in harmony with ourselves, with God, and with our fellowmen.

Through obedience we build spiritual strength that sustains us during times of adversity. My friend and counselor Joy F. Evans tells of such a time in her life. She had four young children and was expecting her fifth child. The much-anticipated day of birth arrived—about six weeks early. They had expected to have “a” baby, but they had twins instead—Michael and Amy, premature and very small.

They had already lost one child earlier, and Joy, being a nurse, felt certain those babies were also going to die. She was even afraid that her own lack of faith would contribute to their dying, and she wanted desperately for them to live!

In her words, “I think it was the first time I couldn’t say ‘Thy will be done.’ I just couldn’t say it.”

When her husband went home the second day after the babies’ birth, he prayed, not for the babies, but for his wife, their mother. Then a sweet assurance came to her that everything was all right: whatever happened was the Lord’s will. The babies did die, one after two days, and the other after three; but Joy still had her feeling of peace. She could draw from the wonderful reservoir of strength she had developed by keeping the commandments through the years.

Having the babies dressed appropriately for burial was very important to their mother, but they were so tiny that clothes could not be found small enough to fit them. When the Relief Society president came after the second baby died, she sensed Joy’s disappointment in not being able to dress the babies as she would like. The president went home and sewed busily that night. When she came back the next morning, the day of the graveside service, she had a darling little white suit for Michael and a dainty little white dress for Amy.

Peace can come to both the giver and the receiver as we follow the promptings of the Spirit to serve one another.

The Lord said, “Keep my commandments, and *assist* to bring forth my work.” (D&C 11:9; italics added.)

Sisters, as women in the Church, each of us has an important role to fill in building His kingdom on earth. The way to do this is clear. We have been commanded to sanctify ourselves that our minds may become single to God so that we can stand firm in the faith, without wavering, until our work is completed. As we keep a time for regular scripture study and quiet time for prayers, we receive knowledge and inspiration. Then, through obedience, we put that information into action. We are sanctifying ourselves one step at a time as we accept personal responsibility for our actions and honor the covenants we make at baptism, in the temple, and as we take the sacrament each Sunday. We progress by living worthy to receive the blessings available to us, responding to those promptings to serve others, by loving one another, and by trying to obey the prophet's voice in all things.

Elder Heber J. Grant said, "If we are striving, if we are working, if we are trying, to the best of our ability, to improve day by day, *then we are in the line of our duty.*" (In Conference Report, Apr. 1909, p. 111.)

From a Thai refugee camp, Mary Ellen Edmunds expressed it well for all of us when she said, "For me I feel close to the Savior when I can do in a small way for someone else, what He would do if He were there. In a way, that's what being an instrument is all about ... to make it possible for His love to reach more of His children."

Sisters, we are those instruments. He needs us, and we need Him. Instruments that are in tune play beautiful melodies. Be obedient. Be prayerful. Remember Him. Keep His commandments. Draw near to Him and feel the joy and peace that will come as He draws near unto you. (See D&C 88:63.)

I know these things to be true and say them in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.