

How President Benson and his beloved wife, Flora, enjoy attending the temple each week! His feeling for the temple is found in his statement: "I love the temples of God. This is the closest place to heaven on earth—the house of the Lord" (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988], p. 253).

We should live in brotherhood

As this conference commences, I join President Benson, and know that I reflect the feelings of President Hinckley and all other General Authorities as well, in declaring our love for Heavenly Father's children everywhere. Perhaps never in history has the need for cooperation, understanding, and goodwill among all people—nations and individuals alike—been so urgent as today. It is not only fitting, it is imperative that we emphasize the ideal of brotherhood and the responsibility true brotherhood confers upon us all.

As Edwin Markham observed:

There is a destiny that makes us
brothers;
None goes his way alone:

All that we send into the lives of
others
Comes back into our own.

We should follow the Savior

Let us live the commandments of God. Let us follow in the footsteps of His Son and our Savior, even Jesus Christ the Lord. As we sincerely and fervently seek Him, we shall indeed find Him.

He may come to us as one unknown, without a name—as of old, by the lakeside, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same words, "Follow thou me" (John 21:22), and sets us to the task which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands, and to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, and the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship; and they shall learn in their own experience who He is.

I bear to you my witness that God does live, that Jesus is the Christ, our Redeemer, and that we are led today by God's prophet, even President Ezra Taft Benson, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will now speak to us.

Elder M. Russell Ballard

Brothers and sisters, I suppose you are as amazed as I am with the monumental world events that we see unfolding. As Latter-day Saints, we recognize the hand of God working to bring about his purposes in the earth. We know that the "stone [that] was cut out without hands" will continue to roll forth to fill the whole earth (see Daniel 2:34–35). These are exciting times to be alive.

Small and simple things shape lives

We observe vast, sweeping world events; however, we must remember that the purposes of the Lord in our personal

lives generally are fulfilled through the small and simple things and not the momentous and spectacular.

Alma, teaching his son Helaman about the importance of the record written on the plates of brass, said:

"Behold I say unto you, that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass; and small means in many instances doth confound the wise.

"And the Lord God doth work by means to bring about his great and eternal purposes; and by very small means the Lord doth confound the wise and bringeth about the salvation of many souls" (Alma 37:6–7).

The essentials of the gospel

To illustrate, let me read from a letter written by one of our faithful sister missionaries, serving in South America, to her brother who had just received his mission call. She wrote:

"It's really interesting with the people from the country—they are so quiet, timid, shy, and embarrassed. You are never sure exactly how much they understand. They will live and die in this small town. They are so poor and so simple and so childlike. They may never see a General Authority, never attend general conference, never go to BYU. They'll never be Boy Scouts, never play basketball in a huge church gym, never drive a car to stake conference, regional basketball finals, or anywhere. Many of the things we think about when we think of the Church—and take for granted—they may never see. [Now, the point.] But they have faith, they repent, they are baptized, they receive the Holy Ghost, and they renew their baptismal covenants each week when they partake of the sacrament. They pray and read the scriptures daily. They know God lives and that Christ is our Savior. And, I believe, they are going to the celestial kingdom. I do all the things they never will, but I'm not so sure about my own salvation.

"At first glance, the Church here looks absolutely nothing like the Church in downtown Orem, Utah. I have to keep reminding myself it is the same church and we all follow the same prophet. We have a sacrament meeting in the country each week because the members there really can't afford to come into town. And as I sit there outside on a wooden chair on the plain ground, with the sun setting and the six people in attendance, as we sing hymns, pray, and partake of the sacrament, I wonder if that isn't closer to Christ's church than at home. But I guess it is really the same. The things that matter, the true elements of the gospel as Christ taught in 3 Nephi 11, are the same here as they are in Orem, Utah."

The simplicity of the Spirit

The Lord has graciously provided the means for conversion even in the most simple and humble of circumstances. Unfortunately, some of us look beyond the mark and depend too much on buildings, budgets, programs, and activities for conversion rather than on the small and simple things that are central to the gospel. We need not look beyond our own hearts to experience the sweet spiritual feelings promised to those who obey God. That is why a new member in the most humble conditions can experience the gospel as deeply as a lifetime member who was raised in the shadow of Church headquarters.

As I meet with some of these humble members, I observe that the Church is, by necessity, being established among them in the most simple way possible. The gospel is taught from the scriptures and from the *Gospel Principles* manual. The people feel the Spirit and bear testimonies as they come into Christ and are baptized in his name. Their love for the Lord radiates from their faces. They know that faith, repentance, baptism, the Holy Ghost, service to others, and keeping the commandments are the essentials for exaltation in the celestial kingdom.

The simplicity of the Lord's work

Last month, Elder Charles Didier and I visited the Saints and missionaries in Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana. We dedicated each of these lands for establishing the Lord's work.

We see a vast difference between the humble circumstances in areas where the Church is still in its tender infancy and the circumstances we are accustomed to in areas where the Church is stable and mature.

When we visited Suriname, we met most of the members and learned that the missionary couple serving there, Elder and Sister Limburg, had taught them the gospel using a series of simple teaching

and learning methods. They had no momentous or spectacular events or activities, only daily spiritual experiences resulting from their sensitive response to the promptings of the Spirit.

The simplicity of the sacrament

A new missionary couple, Brother and Sister Don Rapier, arrived in Suriname one day ahead of Elder Didier and me, so they met the Saints for the first time along with us. We held four sacrament meetings in homes of the Saints on the Sunday we were there. Elder Rapier shared his feelings about blessing the sacrament in the humble home of one of our new converts. He said:

"This was the most humble circumstance that I had ever been in in my life. The house was made of mostly short pieces of lumber. No electricity, no running water. The roof was corrugated sheets. The house and the yard were clean. The place where we held our sacrament meeting was under the overhang in front of the house. The members and the Brethren sat on wooden boards that were laid on bricks. The sacrament table was a small wooden stand that was set on top of a piece of linoleum covering the dirt floor. The sacrament cloths were very simple and very clean.

"As I knelt down to bless the sacrament, I was overwhelmed with the spirit of love that I had quickly developed for this people. I thought surely our Savior was pleased that He was being remembered in such humble circumstances. I thought of our chapels at home. I could never have appreciated the sacrament there like I can now after this special experience. I also observed that it might take several years before these sweet, humble members would fully realize the significance of having two General Authorities, one an Apostle, in their home, blessing them and their family."

Brother Rapier's experience touched deeply each one of us who was there. After the fourth sacrament meeting, my mind reflected upon the words of the Lord: "Wherefore, be not weary in well-

doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great" (D&C 64:33).

A box of macaroni

Another example of the importance of small things comes from Elder and Sister Jackson, missionaries serving in Guyana: "When we first arrived in the mission field in Guyana, we saw in the local Georgetown newspaper the report of the 'Teenager of the Month.' In the report he said his favorite food was macaroni. We took the newspaper clipping, a Book of Mormon, and a box of macaroni and knocked on his door. We have taught and baptized seven of the family since our first visit." This small thing resulted in a great benefit in establishing the Church in Guyana.

Simple things can also destroy

While having these tender, spiritual experiences this past month, I was sobered by how small and simple things can be negative and destructive to a person's salvation. A series of seemingly small but incorrect choices can become those little soul-destroying termites that eat away at the foundations of our testimony until, before we are aware, we may be brought near to spiritual and moral destruction.

This past month, one of the missionaries who served with Sister Ballard and me in Canada shared the details of how small things can compound into near destruction unless the course is corrected. He wrote:

"When I returned from my mission, I married and went to work in the construction industry. Over the next few years we had three children, and during this time I remained active in the Church. The demands of my business became much greater, and I became more determined to do whatever it would take to succeed financially. The effects of this were felt immediately at home; but with the support of an understanding wife, we

felt we could endure until things ‘picked up.’”

He went on to say that because of financial strains, his wife began working. He began working long hours and neglected his family and Church duties. His demanding work schedule left him emotionally drained and physically exhausted. He became critical of others, including his family members and Church leaders.

His letter continues:

“As my debt continued to mount, the destruction of my peace and happiness increased. The love and tenderness we once knew as husband and wife had diminished to only memories. We found character flaws in each other and began to focus on them, wounding each other over the smallest incident. I began to blame everyone but myself, taking no responsibility for failures. A great feeling of hopelessness began to fill my heart, and I felt a cloud of darkness envelop me in my desperation.

“We knew our marriage could not endure under such conditions and began to talk in terms of divorce. I decided to get some financial counseling; after reviewing my finances, it became the joke that I was worth more dead than alive, which seemed funny and rather innocent at the time. After continuing for a few more weeks, the threat of divorce as well as the very real threat of complete financial collapse seemed only a matter of time. The innocent joke of being worth more dead than alive developed into the appearance of a very real solution. I found myself alone at home, facing the crossroads of my decision. The thought came to me to reach out to the Lord one last time. Kneeling, I wept uncontrollably as I cried to the Lord for his mercy and help in my desperate hour.

“A few minutes later, word came that my mission president was in town and wanted to see me in an hour. As I sat with you, I wanted to hide my problems as I had done from everyone else. But your questions came, asking:

“‘How are you?’

“‘Fine.’

“‘How is your wife?’

“‘Doing good.’

“‘How are the children?’

“‘Great.’

“Then came the pause, and you looked into my eyes and asked, ‘How is your business?’ I began to weep as I told you my story.

“During the course of our meeting, you asked me to make you a promise: that I would read the Book of Mormon. After committing to you that I would, you blessed me, telling me to rivet myself to the gospel and to keep the commandments. I left you knowing the Lord had heard my plea for help.”

Small acts can strengthen others

Can you see, brothers and sisters, how many small and simple things took their toll in the life of this fine young man? Like weak fibers that form a yarn, then a strand, and finally a rope, these small things combined together can become too strong to be broken. We must ever be aware of the power that the small and simple things can have in building spirituality. At the same time, we must be aware that Satan will use small and simple things to lead us into despair and misery.

I am grateful that the Lord answered the prayers of this young man by prompting me to do the seemingly small thing of asking to see him. I did not know of any of his problems at the time but was able to help him to once again take hold of the iron rod of the gospel to guide his life. We must never ignore or pass by the prompting of the Spirit to render service to one another.

Great and marvelous events seem to motivate us, but small things often do not hold our attention. Noting that the Liahona worked by faith, Alma stated, “Nevertheless, because those miracles were worked by small means . . . [the people of Lehi] were slothful, and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence and then those marvelous works ceased, and they did not progress in their journey” (Alma 37:41).

Pay attention to the small things

Is our journey sometimes impeded when we forget the importance of small things? (see Alma 37:46). Do we realize that small events and choices determine the direction of our lives just as small helms determine the direction of great ships? (see James 3:4; D&C 123:16). Are we ever like Naaman, the leper, expecting some great thing before we will pay attention to prophets? (see 2 Kings 5:1-14).

May the Lord bless each one of us to follow the counsel of our prophets. We need to have family and personal prayers; study the scriptures, particularly the Book of Mormon; hold family home evenings; follow the admonition of the Savior to love one another; and be thoughtful, kind, and gentle within the family. Through these and other similar small and simple things, we have the promise that our lives will be filled with peace and joy.

Elder Rex D. Pinegar

A "Welcome home" celebration

Several weeks ago in a neighborhood not far from my home, dozens of bright, yellow balloons were seen floating from every tree branch and light post lining a winding, three-block road. It was a beautiful sight on that hazy winter day. Senses were stirred as one drove with anticipation along that friendly, colorful street. Around each bend in the road rose the yellow balloons, waving upward to the top of the hill where a sign warmly proclaimed, "Welcome home, Brigham!" I had heard of Brigham Fordham only a few months ago when I was told of this young eighteen-year-old's tragic accident that left him paralyzed. I only now discovered that this was his home and his homecoming from the hospital.

I noticed the ramp that had been built to the front of the house and thought of other changes that would have been made in his home to accommodate the changes in his life. There will be changes in Brigham's family, too, I thought. Life

I know that Jesus Christ lives and that this is his church. I testify that his gospel will continue to fill the world as it continues to fill the hearts of the individual members of the Church, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The chorus sang "Great King of Heaven" without announcement.

President Monson

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Council of the Twelve Apostles has just spoken to us, followed by the Mormon Youth Chorus singing "Great King of Heaven."

Elder Rex D. Pinegar, a member of the Presidency of the Quorums of the Seventy, will now address us, and he will be followed by Elder Derek A. Cuthbert of the Seventy.

will be different for all the Fordhams— and difficult.

But, as the yellow balloons brightly signaled to Brigham and to all who had the opportunity to travel this street, his was a caring home where family love and strength would be found.

The stronghold of the family

Our Heavenly Father has organized us into families for the purpose of helping us successfully meet the trials and challenges of life. The home also exists to bless us with the joys and privileges of family associations. Our family is our safety place, our support network, our sanctuary, and our salvation.

Our homes should be "the strong place to which children can come for the anchor they need in this day of trouble and turmoil," said President Harold B. Lee (*His Servants Speak*, comp. R. Clayton Brough [Bountiful, Utah: Horizon, 1975], p. 154).