

Return and Receive

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To return to God's presence and to receive the eternal blessings that come from making and keeping covenants are the most important goals we can set.

My brothers and sisters, it is now my assignment to speak to you, and your assignment is to listen. My goal is to finish my assignment before you finish yours. I will do my best.

Over the years, I have observed that those who accomplish the most in this world are those with a vision for their lives, with goals to keep them focused on their vision and tactical plans for how to achieve them. Knowing where you are going and how you expect to get there can bring meaning, purpose, and accomplishment to life.

Some have difficulty differentiating between a goal and a plan until they learn that a goal is a destination or an *end*, while a plan is the route by which you get there. For example, we can have a goal to drive to a certain unfamiliar location, and as some of you dear sisters know, we men often think we know how to get there—often resulting in our saying, "I know it must be just around the next corner." My wife must be smiling. The goal was clear, but there wasn't a good plan in place to reach the destination.

Goal setting is essentially beginning with the end in mind. And planning is devising a way to get to that end. A key to happiness lies in understanding what destinations truly matter—and then spending our time, effort, and attention on the things that constitute a sure way to arrive there.

God, our Heavenly Father, has given us the perfect example of goal setting and planning. His goal is "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man [and woman];"¹ and His means to achieve it is the plan of salvation.

Our beloved Heavenly Father's plan includes giving us a growing, stretching, learning, physical mortality through which we can become more like Him. Clothing our eternal spirits in physical bodies; living by the teachings and commandments of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ; and forming eternal families allows us, through the Savior's Atonement, to fulfill God's goal of immortality and eternal life for His children with Him in His celestial kingdom.

Wise goal setting includes the understanding that short-term goals are only effective if they lead to clearly understood longer-term goals. I believe that one important key to

happiness is to learn how to set our own goals and establish our own plans within the framework of our Heavenly Father's eternal plan. If we focus on this eternal path, we will inevitably qualify to return to His presence.

It is good to have goals and plans for our careers, for our education, even for our golf game. It is also important to have goals for our marriages, our families, and our Church councils and callings; this is especially true for missionaries. But our greatest and most overriding goals should fit into Heavenly Father's eternal plan. Jesus said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."²

Experts on goal setting tell us that the simpler and more straightforward a goal is, the more power it will have. When we can reduce a goal to one clear image or one or two powerful and symbolic words, that goal can then become part of us and guide virtually everything we think and do. I believe that there are two words that, in this context, symbolize God's goals for us and our most important goals for ourselves. The words are *return* and *receive*.

To *return* to His presence and to *receive* the eternal blessings that come from making and keeping covenants are the most important goals we can set.

We *return* and *receive* by having "unshaken faith in [the Lord Jesus Christ], relying wholly upon" His merits, pressing "forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men [and women] ... , feasting upon the word of Christ, and endur[ing] to the end."³

Lucifer did not accept our Father's plan that allowed us to *return* to His presence and *receive* His blessings. In fact, Lucifer rebelled and attempted to completely modify our Father's plan, wanting to take the glory, honor, and power of God to himself. As a result, he was cast out with his minions from God's presence and "became Satan, yea, even the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive and to blind men [and women], and to lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken unto [the Lord's] voice."⁴

Because of his premortal choices, Satan can neither *return* nor *receive*. The only thing left for him is to oppose the Father's plan by using every possible enticement and temptation to bring us down and make us miserable like unto himself.⁵ Satan's plan to accomplish his diabolical goal applies to every individual, generation, culture, and society. He uses loud voices—voices that seek to drown out the small and still voice of the Holy Spirit that can show us "all things" we should do to *return* and *receive*.⁶

These voices belong to those who disregard gospel truth and who use the internet, social and print media, radio, television, and movies to present in an enticing way immorality, violence, ugly language, filth, and sleaze in a way that distracts us from our goals and the plans we have for eternity.

These voices may also include well-intentioned individuals who are blinded by the secular philosophies of men and women and who seek to destroy the faith and divert the eternal focus of those who are simply trying to *return* to the presence of God and *receive* "all that [our] Father hath."⁷

I have found that to stay focused on *returning* and *receiving* the promised blessings, I need to regularly take time to ask myself, "How am I doing?"

It's kind of like having a personal, private interview with yourself. And if that sounds unusual, think about it: who in this world knows you better than you know yourself? You know your thoughts, your private actions, your desires, and your dreams, goals, and plans. And you know better than anyone how you are progressing along the road to *returning* and *receiving*.

As a guide for me during this private, personal review, I like to read and ponder the introspective words found in the fifth chapter of Alma, wherein Alma asks: "Have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?"⁸ Alma's questions are a reminder of what our goals and plans ought to include in order to *return* and *receive*.

Remember the Savior's invitation to "come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."⁹

As we increase our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ's power to give rest unto our souls by forgiving sins, redeeming imperfect relationships, healing the spiritual wounds that stifle growth, and strengthening and enabling us to develop the attributes of Christ, we will more deeply appreciate the magnitude of the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁰

During the coming weeks, find time to review your life's goals and your plans, and make sure they align with our Heavenly Father's great plan for our happiness. If you need to repent and change, then consider doing so now. Take the time to prayerfully think about what adjustments are needed to help you keep your "eye single to the glory of God."¹¹

We must keep the doctrine and gospel of Jesus Christ at the center of our goals and plans. Without Him, no eternal goal is possible, and our plans to achieve our eternal goals will surely fail.

One additional help is "The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles,"¹² which was presented to the Church on January 1, 2000. Place a copy where you can see it, and take time to review each of the statements found in this inspired testimony of Christ by His special witnesses who signed it.

I would urge you to study it along with “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” We speak often about the family proclamation, but please remember to read it in light of the saving power of the living Christ. Without the living Christ, our fondest expectations will be unfulfilled. As the family proclamation states: “The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally.”¹³

This can happen only because the living Christ is the atoning Savior and Redeemer of the world.

In this regard, you may also consider searching the scriptures to expand your understanding of the specific truths found in “The Living Christ.”

Prayerfully reading “The Living Christ” is like reading the testimonies of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the prophets of the Book of Mormon. It will increase your faith in the Savior and help you stay focused on Him as you follow your plans to reach your eternal goals.

Despite our mistakes, shortcomings, detours, and sins, Jesus Christ’s Atonement allows us to repent, prepared to *return* and *receive* the matchless blessings God has promised—to live forever with the Father and the Son in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom.¹⁴

Now as you all know, no one will escape death; therefore, our long-term goal and plan should be that when we *return* to our Heavenly Father, we will *receive* all that He has planned for each one of us.¹⁵

I testify there is no greater goal in mortality than to live eternally with our Heavenly Parents and our beloved Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. But it is more than just *our* goal—it is also *Their* goal. They have a perfect love for us, more powerful than we can even begin to comprehend. They are totally, completely, eternally aligned with us. We are Their work. Our glory is Their glory. More than anything else, They want us to come home—to *return* and *receive* eternal happiness in Their presence.

My dear brothers and sisters, in one week, we will celebrate Palm Sunday—commemorating Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem. In two weeks, we will celebrate Easter Sunday—commemorating the Savior’s triumph over death.

As we focus our attention on the Savior during these two special Sundays, let us remember Him and renew our lifelong commitment to keeping His commandments. Let us look deeply into our own lives, setting our own goals and focusing our plans to align with God’s in a way that will ultimately lead us toward our precious privilege to *return* and *receive*—which is my humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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