

Precious Gifts from God

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Life can be filled with faith, joy, happiness, hope, and love when we exercise the smallest amount of real faith in Christ.

My brothers and sisters, we have just participated in a solemn assembly, a practice that can be traced back to the Bible when ancient Israel gathered to feel the Lord's presence and celebrate His blessings.¹ We are privileged to live in a time when this ancient practice has been restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith.² I urge you to record in your personal journal what you felt regarding this most sacred occasion in which you have taken part.

Recently, we said goodbye to our dear friend and prophet, President Thomas S. Monson. Although we all miss him, we are deeply grateful the Lord has called a new prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, to preside over His Church. In an orderly way we have now begun a new chapter in our Church history. This is a precious gift from God.

As we each sustained President Nelson by our uplifted hands, we stood as witnesses before God and acknowledged that he is President Monson's rightful successor. With our raised hands, we promised to hearken unto his voice as he receives direction from the Lord.

The Lord has said:

"Thou shalt give heed unto all his [meaning the President of the Church] words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them ... ;

"For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith."³

I have known our new prophet-president for over 60 years. I have served with him in the Quorum of the Twelve for 33 years, and I am a witness that the hand of the Lord has been preparing him to become our presiding apostle and prophet to administer all the keys of the holy priesthood on the earth. May each one of us completely sustain him and his counselors and follow their direction. We also warmly welcome Elder Gong and Elder Soares as members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

After Jesus's Resurrection, an event we celebrate this glorious Easter weekend, He appeared to His disciples and said, "Peace be unto you: *as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.*"⁴ Notice a twofold action—God sends His Son. The Son sends His servants—mortal men and women—to accomplish Their work.

We should not be surprised to know that those individuals called to do the Lord's work are not humanly perfect. Stories in the scriptures detail incidents about men and women who were called of God to accomplish a great work—good sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father

called to serve in their assignments in the Church, striving to do their best, but none of them yet perfect. The same is true of us today.

Given the reality of our human weaknesses and shortcomings, how do we move forward in supporting and sustaining each other? It begins with faith—real, sincere faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith in the Savior is the first principle of the doctrine and gospel of Christ.

Several years ago I was visiting the Holy Land. As we drove by a mustard plant, the director of the BYU Jerusalem Center asked if I had ever seen a mustard seed. I hadn't so we stopped. He showed me the seeds from the mustard plant. They were surprisingly small.

I then remembered Jesus's teachings: "For verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you."⁵

If we have faith as small as a mustard seed, the Lord can help us remove the mountains of discouragement and doubt in the tasks ahead of us as we serve with God's children, including family members, Church members, and those who are not yet members of the Church.

Brothers and sisters, life can be filled with faith, joy, happiness, hope, and love when we exercise the smallest amount of real faith in Christ—even a mustard seed of faith.

Elder George A. Smith remembered some advice the Prophet Joseph Smith gave to him: "He told me I should never get discouraged, whatever difficulties might surround me. If I was sunk in the lowest pit of Nova Scotia and all the Rocky Mountains piled on top of me, I ought not to be discouraged but hang on, exercise faith, and keep up good courage and I should come out on the top of the heap at last."⁶

We should remember Paul's declaration: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."⁷ Knowing this is another precious gift from God.

In addition to the gifts I have mentioned, there are many, many more. I speak now of just a few—the gift of the Sabbath day, the sacrament, service to others, and the matchless gift from God of our Savior.

The power of the Sabbath day is to experience in church and at home the delight, the joy, and the warmth of feeling the Spirit of the Lord without any kind of distraction.

Too many allow themselves to almost live online with their smart devices—screens illuminating their faces day and night and earbuds in their ears blocking out the still, small voice of the Spirit. If we do not find time to unplug, we may miss opportunities to hear the voice of Him who said, "Be still, and know that I am God."⁸ Now, there is nothing wrong with taking advantage of the advances in the technologies inspired by the Lord, but we must be wise in their use. Remember the gift of the Sabbath day.

The blessing of receiving the sacrament in sacrament meeting must never become routine or just something we do. It is only 70 minutes in a whole week when we can pause and find more peace, joy, and happiness in our lives.

Partaking of the sacrament and renewing our covenants is a sign by us to the Lord that we do always remember Him. His Atonement is a gracious gift from God.

The privilege of service to Heavenly Father's children is another opportunity to follow the example of His Beloved Son by serving one another.

Some service opportunities are formal—in our family, our Church callings, and our participation in community service organizations.

Church members—both men and women—should not hesitate, if they desire, to run for public office at any level of government wherever they live. Our voices are essential today and important in our schools, our cities, and our countries. Where democracy exists, it is our duty as members to vote for honorable men and women who are willing to serve.

Many opportunities to serve are informal—without assignment—and come as we reach out to others we meet in life's journey. Remember Jesus taught the lawyer that we should love God and our neighbor as ourselves using the good Samaritan as an example.⁹

Service opens a window by which we understand the life and ministry of Christ. He came to serve, as the scriptures teach, "even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."¹⁰

Peter may have given the best description of the Savior's mortal ministry in five words when he referred to Jesus, "who went about doing good."¹¹

The Lord Jesus Christ is our most precious of all gifts from God. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."¹²

Nephi captured the importance of our Savior when he declared, "We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins."¹³ We must keep Christ as the center of our lives at all times and in all places.

We should remember that it is His name that appears on our places of worship; we are baptized in His name; and we are confirmed, ordained, endowed, and sealed in marriage in His name. We partake of the sacrament and promise to take upon ourselves His name—and become true Christians. Finally, we are asked in the sacrament prayer to "always remember him."¹⁴

As we prepare for Easter Sunday tomorrow, let us remember that Christ is supreme. He is the righteous Judge, our faithful Advocate, our blessed Redeemer, the Good Shepherd, the promised Messiah, a true Friend, and much, much more. He is indeed a very precious gift to us from our Father.

In our discipleship, we have many demands, concerns, and assignments. However, some activities must always be at the heart of our Church membership. "Wherefore," the Lord commands, "be faithful; stand in the office which I have appointed unto you; *succor* the weak, *lift* up the hands which hang down, and *strengthen* the feeble knees."¹⁵

This is the Church in action! This is pure religion! This is the gospel in its true sense as we succor, lift, and strengthen those in spiritual and temporal need! Doing so requires us to visit them and to assist them,¹⁶ that their testimonies of faith in Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ and His Atonement will be anchored in their hearts.

May the Lord help and bless us to treasure our many precious gifts from God, including our membership in His restored Church. I pray we will be filled with love for our Heavenly Father's children and be able to see their needs and be willing to answer their questions and concerns about the gospel in clear and kind ways that will increase understanding and appreciation for one another.

I testify that Jesus Christ is our Savior. What we will be taught at this general conference comes to us by inspiration from apostles and prophets, from General Authorities, and sister leaders who are General Officers of the Church. May the joy and peace of the Lord abide with each one is my humble prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

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