

Our Campfire of Faith

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For those who seek, allow, and live for it, the dawn of faith, sometimes gradually, will come or can return.

Dear brothers and sisters, isn't it marvelous to receive continuing revelation from heaven through President Russell M. Nelson and our Church leaders that invites us to live in new and holier ways,¹ at home and at church, with all our heart, mind, and strength?

Have you ever had opportunity to do something for which you felt unprepared or inadequate but that you were blessed for trying?

I have. Here's one example.

Some years ago, Elder Richard G. Scott, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, kindly invited, "Gerrit, would you like to watercolor with me?"

Elder Scott said painting helped him observe and create. He has written: "Attempt to be creative, even if the results are modest. ... Creativity can engender a spirit of gratitude for life and for what the Lord has woven into your being. ... If you choose wisely, it doesn't have to absorb a lot of time."²

President Henry B. Eyring describes his artistic meditations as motivated by "a feeling of love," including "the love of a Creator who expects His children to become like Him—to create and to build."³ President Eyring's creative works provide a "unique, spiritual perspective on testimony and faith."⁴

President Boyd K. Packer's artwork illustrates a fundamental gospel message: "God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and all things that are in them, that all nature bears testimony of that divinely directed creation, and that there is [a] complete harmony between nature, science, and the gospel of Jesus Christ."⁵

Alma testifies, "All things denote there is a God."⁶ Our Primary children sing, "Whenever I hear the song of a bird or look at the blue, blue sky, ... I'm glad that I live in this beautiful world Heav'nly Father created for me."⁷ Author Victor Hugo celebrates the "miraculous relationships between beings and things; in this inexhaustible whole, from sun to aphid. ... All the birds that fly hold the thread of eternity in their claws. ... A nebula is an anthill of stars."⁸

And that brings us back to Elder Scott's invitation.

"Elder Scott," I replied, "I would like to become more observant and creative. I thrill to imagine Heavenly Father paints with billowing clouds and every hue of sky and water. But"—here was a

long pause—"Elder Scott," I said, "I have no skill to watercolor. I worry it may frustrate you to try and teach me."

Elder Scott smiled and arranged for us to meet. On the appointed day, he prepared the paper, paints, and brushes. He sketched some outlines and helped wet the paper for me.

We used as a model his beautiful watercolor titled *Campfire at Sunset*. As we painted, we talked about faith—how as we face the light and warmth of a campfire, we leave the darkness and uncertainty behind us—how on sometimes long, lonely nights, our campfire of faith can give hope and assurance. And the dawn does come. Our campfire of faith—our memories, experiences, and heritage of faith in God's goodness and tender mercies in our life—has strengthened us through the night.

My testimony is—for those who seek, allow, and live for it—the dawn of faith, sometimes gradually, will come or can return. The light will come when we desire and seek it, when we are patient and obedient to God's commandments, when we are open to God's grace, healing, and covenants.

As we began painting, Elder Scott encouraged, "Gerrit, even with one lesson you will paint something you will want to keep and remember." Elder Scott was right. I treasure the watercolor of our campfire of faith Elder Scott helped me paint. My artistic ability was and remains limited, but the remembrance of our campfire of faith can encourage us in five ways.

First, our campfire of faith can encourage us to find joy in wholesome creativity.

There is joy in imagining, learning, doing worthwhile new things. This is especially true as we deepen faith and trust in Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. We cannot love ourselves enough to save ourselves. But Heavenly Father loves us more and knows us better than we love or know ourselves. We can trust the Lord and lean not unto our own understanding.⁹

Have you ever been the only one not invited to someone's birthday party?

Have you ever been chosen last, or not chosen, when teams were selected?

Have you prepared for a school test, a job interview, an opportunity you really wanted—and you felt you failed?

Have you prayed for a relationship that, for whatever reason, has not worked out?

Have you faced chronic illness, been abandoned by a spouse, agonized for family?

Our Savior knows our circumstances. As we exercise God-given agency and engage all our faculties in humility and faith, our Savior, Jesus Christ, can help us meet life's challenges and joys. Faith includes a desire and choice to believe. Faith also comes from obeying God's commandments, given to bless us, as we follow His covenant path.

When we have felt, or feel, uncertain, alone, frustrated, angry, let down, disappointed, or estranged from God and His restored Church, it may take an extra measure of effort and faith to enter again on His covenant path. But it is worth it! Please come, or come again, unto the Lord Jesus Christ! God's love is stronger than the cords of death—temporal or spiritual.¹⁰ Our Savior's Atonement is infinite and eternal. Each of us strays and falls short. We may, for a time,

lose our way. God lovingly assures us, no matter where we are or what we have done, there is no point of no return. He waits ready to embrace us.¹¹

Second, our campfire of faith can encourage us to minister in new, higher, and holier Spirit-filled ways.

Such ministering brings miracles and the blessings of covenant belonging—where we feel God’s love and seek to minister to others in that spirit.

Not long ago, Sister Gong and I became acquainted with a father and family blessed by a faithful priesthood brother who came to their bishop and asked if he (the priesthood brother) could be a home teaching companion with the father. The father was not active and not interested in home teaching. But as the father’s heart changed, he and this loving priesthood brother began visiting “their” families. After one such visit, his wife—herself not then attending church—asked her husband how things had gone. The father admitted, “I may have felt something”—then he went to the kitchen to get a beer.¹²

But one thing followed another: tender experiences, ministering service, changing hearts, temple preparation class, coming to church, being sealed as a family in the holy temple. Imagine how grateful the children and grandchildren are to their father and mother and to the ministering brother who came as a friend and companion with their father to minister to and love others.

A third campfire of faith encouragement: creative gospel joy and blessings come when we seek to love the Lord and others with all our hearts and souls.

The scriptures invite us to place all we are and are becoming on the altar of love and service. In the Old Testament, Deuteronomy enjoins us to “love the Lord thy God” with all our heart, soul, and might.¹³ Joshua exhorts, “Love the Lord your God, ... walk in all his ways, ... keep his commandments, ... cleave unto him, and ... serve him with all your heart and with all your soul.”¹⁴

In the New Testament, our Savior states the two great commandments: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, ... and thy neighbour as thyself.”¹⁵

In the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ, King Benjamin labored “with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul” and established peace in the land.¹⁶ In the Doctrine and Covenants, as every missionary knows, the Lord asks us to serve Him with all our “heart, might, mind and strength.”¹⁷ When the Saints entered Jackson County, the Lord commanded them to keep the Sabbath holy by loving “the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy might, mind, and strength; and in the name of Jesus Christ thou shalt serve him.”¹⁸

We rejoice in the invitation to devote our whole souls to seeking higher and holier ways to love God and those around us and to strengthen our faith in Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ in our hearts and in our homes and at church.

Fourth, our campfire of faith encourages us to establish regular patterns of righteous living that deepen faith and spirituality.

These holy habits, righteous routines, or prayerful patterns may include prayer; scripture study; fasting; remembering our Savior and covenants through the ordinance of the sacrament; sharing gospel blessings through missionary, temple and family history, and other service; keeping a thoughtful personal journal; and so on.

When righteous patterns and spiritual yearnings join, time and eternity come together. Spiritual light and life come when regular religious observance draws us closer to our Heavenly Father and our Savior, Jesus Christ. When we love the spirit and letter of the law, the things of eternity can distill upon our souls like the dew from heaven.¹⁹ With daily obedience and refreshing living water, we find answers, faith, and strength to meet everyday challenges and opportunities with gospel patience, perspective, and joy.

Fifth, as we keep the best of familiar patterns while seeking new and holier ways to love God and help us and others prepare to meet Him, our campfire of faith can encourage us to remember perfection is in Christ, not in ourselves or in the perfectionism of the world.

God's invitations are full of love and possibility because Jesus Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life."²⁰ To those who feel burdened, He invites, "Come unto me," and to those who come to Him, He promises, "I will give you rest."²¹ "Come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, ... love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ."²²

In this assurance "by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ" is also the comfort, peace, and promise that we can continue forward with faith and confidence in the Lord even when things do not go as we hope, expect, or perhaps deserve, through no fault of our own, even after we have done our best.

In various times and ways, we all feel inadequate, uncertain, perhaps unworthy. Yet in our faithful efforts to love God and to minister to our neighbor, we may feel God's love and needed inspiration for their and our lives in new and holier ways.

With compassion, our Savior encourages and promises we can "press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men."²³ The doctrine of Christ, our Savior's Atonement, and our whole-souled following of His covenant path can help us know His truths and make us free.²⁴

I testify the fulness of His gospel and His plan of happiness are restored and taught in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in holy scripture, and by prophets from the Prophet Joseph Smith to President Russell M. Nelson today. I testify His covenant path leads to the greatest gift our loving Heavenly Father promises: "Ye shall have eternal life."²⁵

May His blessings and enduring joy be ours as we warm our hearts and hopes and commitment at our campfire of faith, I pray in the sacred and holy name of Jesus Christ, amen.