

Abound with Blessings

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Most blessings that God desires to give us require action on our part—action based on our faith in Jesus Christ.

My dear brothers and sisters, our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ desire to bless each of us.¹ The question of *how* to access and obtain those blessings has been the subject of theological debate and discussion for centuries.² Some contend that blessings are completely earned; we receive them only through our works. Others argue that God has already chosen who He will bless and how—and that these determinations are unchangeable. Both positions are fundamentally flawed. Blessings from heaven are neither earned by frenetically accruing “good deed coupons” nor by helplessly waiting to see if we win the blessing lottery. No, the truth is much more nuanced but more appropriate for the relationship between a loving Heavenly Father and His potential heirs—us. Restored truth reveals that blessings are never earned, but faith-inspired actions on our part, both initial and ongoing, are essential.³

As we consider how we receive blessings from God, let us liken heavenly blessings to a massive pile of wood. Imagine at the center a small mound of kindling, topped by a layer of wood chips. Sticks come next, then small logs, and finally huge logs. This woodpile contains an enormous amount of fuel, capable of producing light and heat for days. Envision next to the woodpile a single match, the kind with a phosphorus tip.⁴

For the energy in the woodpile to be released, the match needs to be struck and the kindling lit. The kindling will quickly catch fire and cause the larger pieces of wood to burn. Once this combustion reaction starts, it continues until all the wood is burned or the fire is deprived of oxygen.

Striking the match and lighting the kindling are small actions that enable the potential energy of the wood to be released.⁵ Until the match is struck, nothing happens, regardless of the size of the woodpile. If the match is struck but not applied to the kindling, the amount of light and heat released from the match alone is miniscule and the combustion energy in the wood remains unreleased. If oxygen is not supplied at any point, the combustion reaction stops.

In a similar way, most blessings that God desires to give us require action on our part—action based on our faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in the Savior is a principle of action and of power.⁶ First we act in faith; then the power comes—according to God’s will and timing. The sequence is crucial.⁷ The required action, though, is always tiny when compared to the blessings we ultimately receive.⁸

Consider what happened when fiery, flying serpents came among the ancient Israelites on their way to the promised land. The bite of a poisonous serpent was fatal. But a bitten individual could be healed by looking at a brass serpent fashioned by Moses and placed on a pole.⁹ How much energy does it take to look at something? All who looked accessed the powers of heaven and were healed. Other Israelites who were bitten failed to look at the brazen serpent and died. Perhaps they lacked

the faith to look.¹⁰ Perhaps they did not believe that such a simple action could trigger the promised healing. Or perhaps they willfully hardened their hearts and rejected the counsel of God's prophet.¹¹

The principle of activating blessings that flow from God is eternal. Like those ancient Israelites, we too must act on our faith in Jesus Christ to be blessed. God has revealed that "there is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—and when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated."¹² That being said, you do not earn a blessing—that notion is false—but you do have to qualify for it. Our salvation comes only through the merits and grace of Jesus Christ.¹³ The immensity of His atoning sacrifice means that the woodpile is infinite; our puny actions approach zero in comparison. But they are not zero, and they are not insignificant; in the dark, a match that is lit can be seen for miles. In fact, it can be seen in heaven because small acts of faith are required to ignite God's promises.¹⁴

To receive a desired blessing from God, act with faith, striking the metaphorical match on which the heavenly blessing is contingent. For example, one of the objects of prayer is to secure blessings that God is willing to grant but that are made conditional on our asking.¹⁵ Alma cried out for mercy, and his pains resolved; he was no longer harrowed up by the memory of his sins. His joy overwhelmed his pain—all because he cried out with faith in Jesus Christ.¹⁶ The activation energy needed for us is to have enough faith in Christ to sincerely ask God in prayer and accept His will and timing for the answer.

Often, the activation energy needed for blessings requires more than just looking or asking; ongoing, repeated, faith-filled actions are required. In the middle of the 19th century, Brigham Young directed a group of Latter-day Saints to explore and settle Arizona, an arid region in North America. After reaching Arizona, the group ran out of water and feared they would perish. They pled with God for help. Soon rain and snow fell, allowing them to fill their barrels with water and provide for their livestock. Grateful and refreshed, they returned to Salt Lake City rejoicing in the goodness of God. Upon their return, they reported the details of their expedition to Brigham Young and pronounced their conclusion that Arizona was uninhabitable.

After listening to the report, Brigham Young asked a man in the room what he thought about the expedition and the miracle. That man, Daniel W. Jones, tersely replied, "I would have filled up, went on, and prayed again." Brother Brigham put his hand on Brother Jones and said, "This is the man that shall take charge of the next trip to Arizona."¹⁷

We can all recall times when we have pushed on and prayed again—and blessings resulted. The experiences of Michael and Marian Holmes illustrate these principles. Michael and I served together as Area Seventies. I was always thrilled whenever he was called on to pray in our meetings because his deep spirituality was readily apparent; he knew how to speak with God. I loved to hear him pray. Early in their marriage, though, Michael and Marian were not praying or attending church. They were busy with three little children and a successful construction company. Michael did not feel that he was a religious man. One evening, their bishop came to their home and encouraged them to begin praying.

After the bishop left, Michael and Marian decided that they would try to pray. Before going to bed, they knelt at their bedside and, uncomfortably, Michael began. After a few awkward words of prayer, Michael abruptly stopped, saying, "Marian, I can't do this." As he stood and began walking away,

Marian grabbed him by the hand, dragged him back to his knees, and said, "Mike, you can do this. Try again!" With this encouragement, Michael finished a short prayer.

The Holmeses began to pray regularly. They accepted a neighbor's invitation to attend church. As they walked into the chapel and heard the opening hymn, the Spirit whispered to them, "This is true." Later, unseen and unasked, Michael helped haul some trash from the meetinghouse. As he did, he felt a distinct impression, "This is My house."

Michael and Marian accepted Church callings and served in their ward and stake. They were sealed to each other, and their 3 children were sealed to them. More children followed, bringing the total to 12. The Holmeses served as mission president and companion—twice.

The first clunky prayer was a small but faith-filled action that triggered the blessings of heaven. The Holmeses fed the flames of faith by attending church and serving. Their dedicated discipleship over the years has led to a raging inferno that inspires to this day.

A fire, however, must receive a constant supply of oxygen for the wood to ultimately release its full potential. As demonstrated by Michael and Marian Holmes, faith in Christ requires ongoing action for the blaze to continue. Small actions fuel our ability to walk along the covenant path and lead to the greatest blessings God can offer. But oxygen flows only if we figuratively keep moving our feet. Sometimes we need to make a bow and arrow before revelation comes as to where we should search for food.¹⁸ Sometimes we need to make tools before revelations come as to how to build a ship.¹⁹ Sometimes, at the direction of the Lord's prophet, we need to bake a small cake from the little oil and flour we have to receive an unfailing cruse of oil and barrel of flour.²⁰ And sometimes we need to "be still and know that [God is] God" and trust in His timing.²¹

When you receive any blessing from God, you can conclude that you have complied with an eternal law governing reception of that blessing.²² But remember that the "irrevocably decreed" law is time insensitive, meaning blessings come on God's timetable. Even ancient prophets in search of their heavenly home²³ "died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off ... [and] were persuaded ... and embraced them."²⁴ If a desired blessing from God has not been received—yet—you do not need to go crazy, wondering what more you need to do. Instead, heed Joseph Smith's counsel to "cheerfully do all things that lie in [your] power; and then ... stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the ... arm [of God] ... revealed."²⁵ Some blessings are reserved for later, even for the most valiant of God's children.²⁶

Six months ago a home-centered, Church-supported plan to learn doctrine, strengthen faith, and fortify individuals and families was introduced. President Russell M. Nelson promised that the changes can help us survive spiritually, increase our gospel joy, and deepen our conversion to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.²⁷ But it is up to us to claim these blessings. We are each responsible to open and study *Come, Follow Me—For Individuals and Families*, along with the scriptures and other *Come, Follow Me* material.²⁸ We need to discuss them with our family and friends and organize our Sabbath day to light a metaphorical fire. Or we can leave the resources sitting in a pile in our homes with the potential energy trapped inside.

I invite you to faithfully activate heavenly power to receive specific blessings from God. Exercise the faith to strike the match and light the fire. Supply the needed oxygen while you patiently wait on the Lord. With these invitations, I pray that the Holy Ghost will guide and direct you so that you, like the faithful person described in Proverbs, will "abound with blessings."²⁹ I testify that your Heavenly

Father and His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, live, are concerned with your welfare, and delight to bless you, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.