

# Standing by Our Promises and Covenants

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I invite you to consider the promises and covenants you make with the Lord, and with others, with great integrity, knowing that your word is your bond.

Dear brothers and sisters, as we close this session, may we each hold in our hearts the witness borne today of the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are blessed to have this sacred time together to reinforce our promise to the Lord Jesus Christ that we are His servants and He is our Savior.

The importance of making and keeping promises and covenants weighs heavy on my mind. How important is it to you to keep your word? to be trusted? to do what you say you will do? to strive to honor your sacred covenants? to have integrity? By living true to our promises to the Lord and to others, we walk the covenant path back to our Father in Heaven and we feel His love in our lives.

Our Savior, Jesus Christ, is our great Exemplar when it comes to making and keeping promises and covenants. He came to earth promising to do the will of the Father. He taught gospel principles in word and in deed. He atoned for our sins that we might live again. He has honored every one of His promises.

Can the same be said of each of us? What are the dangers if we cheat a little, slip a little, or do not quite follow through with our commitments? What if we walk away from our covenants? Will others come unto Christ in light of our example? Is your word your bond? Keeping promises is not a habit; it is a characteristic of being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Ever mindful of our frailties in mortal life, the Lord promised, “Be of good cheer, and do not fear, for I the Lord am with you, and will stand by you.”<sup>1</sup> I have felt His presence when needing reassurance, comfort, or greater spiritual insight or strength, and I have been deeply humbled and am grateful for His divine companionship.

The Lord has said, “Every soul who forsaketh his sins and cometh unto me, and calleth on my name, and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face and know that I am.”<sup>2</sup> That is perhaps His ultimate promise.

I learned the importance of keeping my word in my youth. One such example is when I stood at attention to recite the Scout Oath. Our association with the Boy Scouts of America, as it now concludes, will always be an important legacy to me and this Church. To the Scouting organization, to the scores of men and women who have served diligently as Scout leaders, to the moms—real credit goes there—and to the young men who have participated in Scouting, we say, “Thank you.”

In this very session, our dear prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, and Elder Quentin L. Cook have announced adjustments that will refocus our attention on youth and align our organizations with revealed truth. In addition, just last Sunday, President Nelson and President M. Russell Ballard explained the new Children and Youth of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints program for the entire Church. It is a worldwide initiative focused on our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles are unified in this new direction, and I personally bear my witness that the Lord has guided us every step of the way. I am excited for the children and youth of the Church to experience this integrated focus on them both at home and at church—through gospel learning, service and activities, and personal development.

The youth theme for this coming year, 2020, speaks of Nephi's classic promise to "go and do." He wrote, "And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said unto my father: I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them."<sup>3</sup> Although it was uttered long ago, we in the Church stand on that promise today.

To "go and do" means rising above the ways of the world, receiving and acting on personal revelation, living righteously with hope and faith in the future, making and keeping covenants to follow Jesus Christ, and thereby increasing our love for Him, the Savior of the world.

A covenant is a two-way promise between us and the Lord. As members of the Church, we covenant at baptism to take upon us the name of Jesus Christ, to live as He lived. Like those baptized at the Waters of Mormon, we covenant to become His people, "to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light; ... to mourn with those that mourn; ... comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places."<sup>4</sup> Our ministering one to another in the Church reflects our commitment to honor those very promises.

When we partake of the sacrament, we renew that covenant to take upon us His name and make additional promises to improve. Our daily thoughts and actions, both large and small, reflect our commitment to Him. His sacred promise in return is "If ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you."<sup>5</sup>

My question today is, do we stand by our promises and covenants, or are they sometimes half-hearted commitments, casually made and hence easily broken? When we say to someone, "I will pray for you," do we? When we commit, "I will be there to help," will we? When we obligate ourselves to pay a debt, do we? When we raise our hands to sustain a fellow member in a new calling, which means to give support, do we?

One evening in my youth, my mother sat with me at the foot of her bed and spoke fervently of the importance of living the Word of Wisdom. "I know from the experiences of others, from years ago," she said, "the loss of spirituality and sensitivity that comes from not following the Word of Wisdom." She looked right

into my eyes, and I felt her words penetrate my heart: “Promise me, Ronnie, today (she called me Ronnie), that you will always live the Word of Wisdom.” I solemnly made that promise to her, and I have held to it all these years.

That commitment served me well when I was in my youth and in later years when I was in business circles where substances flowed freely. I made a decision in advance to follow God’s laws, and I never had to revisit it. The Lord has said, “I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise.”<sup>6</sup> What is He saying to those who abide by the Word of Wisdom? That we will have the promise of health, strength, wisdom, knowledge, and angels to protect us.<sup>7</sup>

Some years ago, Sister Rasband and I were at the Salt Lake Temple for the sealing of one of our daughters. As we stood outside the temple with a younger daughter not yet old enough to attend the ceremony, we spoke of the importance of being sealed in the holy temple of God. As my mother had taught me years before, we said to our daughter, “We want you safely sealed in the temple, and we want you to promise us that when you find your eternal companion, you will make a date with him to be sealed in the temple.” She gave us her word.



She has since stated that our talk and her promise protected her and reminded her “what was most important.” She later made sacred covenants as she was sealed to her husband in the temple.

President Nelson has taught: “We ... increase the Savior’s power in our lives when we make sacred covenants and keep those covenants with precision. Our covenants bind us to Him and give us godly power.”<sup>8</sup>

When we keep promises to one another, we are more likely to keep promises to the Lord. Remember the Lord's words: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."<sup>9</sup>

Reflect with me on examples of promises in the scriptures. Ammon and the sons of Mosiah in the Book of Mormon committed "to preach the word of God."<sup>10</sup> When Ammon was captured by Lamanite forces, he was taken before the Lamanite King Lamoni. He committed to the king, "I will be thy servant."<sup>11</sup> When raiders came to steal the king's sheep, Ammon cut off their arms. So astonished was the king, he listened to Ammon's message of the gospel and was converted.

Ruth, in the Old Testament, promised her mother-in-law, "Whither thou goest, I will go."<sup>12</sup> She lived true to her word. The good Samaritan, in a parable in the New Testament, promised the innkeeper if he would care for the injured traveler, "Whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee."<sup>13</sup> Zoram, in the Book of Mormon, promised to go into the wilderness with Nephi and his brothers. Nephi recounted, "When Zoram had made an oath unto us, our fears did cease concerning him."<sup>14</sup>

What of the ancient promise "made to the fathers" as described in the scriptures that "the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers"?<sup>15</sup> In the pre-earth life when we chose God's plan, we made a promise to help gather Israel on both sides of the veil. "We went into a partnership with the Lord," Elder John A. Widtsoe explained years ago. "The working out of the plan became then not merely the Father's work, and the Savior's work, but also our work."<sup>16</sup>

"[The] gathering is the most important thing taking place on earth today," President Nelson has said as he has traveled the world. "When we speak of the *gathering*, we are simply saying this fundamental truth: every one of our Heavenly Father's children, on both sides of the veil, deserves to hear the message of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ."<sup>17</sup>

As an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, I conclude with an invitation and promise. First, the invitation: I invite you to consider the promises and covenants you make with the Lord, and with others, with great integrity, knowing that your word is your bond. Second, I promise you, as you do this, the Lord will establish your words and sanction your deeds as you strive with unwearied diligence to build up your lives, your families, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He will be with you, my dear brothers and sisters, and you can, with confidence, look forward to being "received into heaven, that thereby [you] may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness ... for the Lord God hath spoken it."<sup>18</sup>

Of this I testify and promise in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.