

Consider the Goodness and Greatness of God

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I invite you to remember each day the greatness of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ and what They have done for you.

Throughout time, even and especially during difficult times, prophets have encouraged us to remember the greatness of God and to consider what He has done for us as individuals, as families, and as a people.¹ This direction is found throughout the scriptures but is notably prominent in the Book of Mormon. The title page explains that one of the Book of Mormon's purposes is "to show unto the remnant of the house of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers."² The Book of Mormon's conclusion includes Moroni's appeal: "Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things ... that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men ... and ponder it in your hearts."³

The consistency of pleas from prophets to reflect on the goodness of God is striking.⁴ Our Heavenly Father wants us to recall His and His Beloved Son's goodness, not for Their own gratification but for the influence such remembrance has on us. By considering Their kindness, our perspective and understanding are enlarged. By reflecting on Their compassion, we become more humble, prayerful, and steadfast.

A poignant experience with a former patient shows how gratitude for generosity and compassion can transform us. In 1987, I became acquainted with Thomas Nielson, a remarkable man who needed a heart transplant. He was 63 years old and lived in Logan, Utah, in the United States. Following military service during World War II, he married Donna Wilkes in the Logan Utah Temple. He became an energetic and successful brick mason. In later years he especially enjoyed working with his oldest grandchild, Jonathan, during school vacations. The two developed a special bond, in part because Tom saw much of himself in Jonathan.

Tom found waiting for a donor heart frustrating. He was not a particularly patient man. He had always been able to set and achieve goals through hard work and sheer determination. Struggling with heart failure, with his life on hold, Tom sometimes asked me what I was doing to speed up the process. Jokingly, he suggested avenues I could pursue that would make a donor heart available to him sooner.

One joyous yet dreadful day, an ideal donor heart became available for Tom. The size and blood type were a match, and the donor was young, just 16 years old. The donor heart belonged to Jonathan, Tom's beloved grandson. Earlier that day,

Jonathan had been fatally injured when the car in which he was riding was struck by a passing train.

When I visited Tom and Donna in the hospital, they were distraught. It is hard to imagine what they were going through, knowing that Tom's life could be extended by using their grandson's heart. At first, they refused to consider the proffered heart from Jonathan's grieving parents, their daughter and son-in-law. Tom and Donna knew, though, that Jonathan was brain dead, and came to understand that their prayers for a donor heart for Tom had not caused Jonathan's accident. No, Jonathan's heart was a gift that could bless Tom in his time of need. They recognized that something good might come out of this tragedy and decided to proceed.

The transplant procedures went well. Afterward, Tom was a different man. The change went beyond improved health or even gratitude. He told me that he reflected every morning on Jonathan, on his daughter and son-in-law, on the gift he had received, and on what that gift had entailed. Even though his innate good humor and grit were still readily apparent, I observed that Tom was more solemn, thoughtful, and kindhearted.

Tom lived an additional 13 years after the transplant, years he otherwise would not have had. His obituary stated that these years allowed him to touch the lives of his family and others with generosity and love. He was a private benefactor and an example of optimism and determination.

Much like Tom, each of us has received gifts that we could not provide for ourselves, gifts from our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son, including redemption through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.⁵ We have received life in this world; we will receive physical life in the hereafter, and eternal salvation and exaltation—if we choose it—all because of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.

Every time we use, benefit from, or even think of these gifts, we ought to consider the sacrifice, generosity, and compassion of the givers. Reverence for the givers does more than just make us grateful. Reflecting on Their gifts can and should transform us.

One remarkable transformation was that of Alma the Younger. As Alma was “going about rebelling against God,”⁶ an angel appeared. With “a voice of thunder,”⁷ the angel chastised Alma for persecuting the Church and “stealing away the hearts of the people.”⁸ The angel added this admonition: “Go, and remember the captivity of thy fathers ...; and remember how great things [God] has done for them.”⁹ Of all possible exhortations, that was what the angel emphasized.

Alma repented and remembered. He later shared the angel's admonition with his son Helaman. Alma counseled, “I would that ye should do as I have done, in remembering the captivity of our fathers; for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it was the God of Abraham, ... Isaac, and ... Jacob; and he surely did deliver them in their afflictions.”¹⁰ Alma said simply, “I do put my trust in him.”¹¹ Alma understood that by remembering deliverance from bondage

and support during “trials and troubles of every kind,” we come to know God and the surety of His promises.¹²

Few of us have an experience as dramatic as Alma’s, yet our transformation can be equally profound. The Savior pledged anciently:

“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart ... , and I will give you an heart of flesh.

“And I will put my spirit within you. ...

“... And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.”¹³

The resurrected Savior told the Nephites how this transformation begins. He identified a pivotal feature in Heavenly Father’s plan when He said:

“And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might *draw* all men unto me. ...

“And for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore, according to the power of the Father I will *draw* all men unto me.”¹⁴

What does it take for you to be drawn to the Savior? Consider Jesus Christ’s submission to His Father’s will, His victory over death, His taking upon Himself your sins and mistakes, His receiving power from the Father to make intercession for you, and His ultimate redemption of you.¹⁵ Are these things not sufficient to draw you to Him? They are for me. Jesus Christ “stands with open arms, hoping and willing to heal, forgive, cleanse, strengthen, purify, and sanctify [you and me].”¹⁶

These truths should give us a new heart and prompt us to choose to follow Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. Yet even new hearts may be “prone to wander, ... prone to leave the God [we] love.”¹⁷ To fight this tendency, we need to reflect every day on the gifts we have received and on what they entailed. King Benjamin counseled, “I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God ... and his goodness and long-suffering towards you.”¹⁸ If we do so, we qualify for remarkable heavenly blessings.

Reflecting on God’s goodness and mercy helps us become more spiritually receptive. In turn, increased spiritual sensitivity allows us to come to know the truth of all things by the power of the Holy Ghost.¹⁹ This includes a testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon; knowing that Jesus is the Christ, our personal Savior and Redeemer; and accepting that His gospel has been restored in these latter days.²⁰

When we remember the greatness of our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ and what They have done for us, we will not take Them for granted, just as Tom did not take Jonathan’s heart for granted. In a joyful and reverent way, Tom remembered each day the tragedy that brought him extended life. In the exuberance of knowing that we can be saved and exalted, we need to remember that salvation and exaltation came at a great cost.²¹ We can be reverently joyful as we realize that

without Jesus Christ, we are doomed, but with Him, we can receive the greatest gift Heavenly Father can give.²² Indeed, this reverence allows us to enjoy the promise “of eternal life in this world” and eventually receive “eternal life ... even immortal glory” in the world to come.²³

When we consider the goodness of our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, our trust in Them increases. Our prayers change because we know God is our Father and we are His children. We seek not to change His will but to align our will with His and secure for ourselves blessings that He wants to grant, conditioned on our asking for them.²⁴ We yearn to be more meek, more pure, more steadfast, more Christlike.²⁵ These changes qualify us for additional heavenly blessings.

By acknowledging that every good thing comes from Jesus Christ, we will communicate our faith more effectively to others.²⁶ We will have courage when confronted with seemingly impossible tasks and circumstances.²⁷ We will strengthen our resolve to keep the covenants we have made to follow the Savior.²⁸ We will be filled with the love of God, want to help those in need without being judgmental, love our children and raise them in righteousness, retain a remission of our sins, and always rejoice.²⁹ These are the remarkable fruits of remembering God’s goodness and mercy.

In contrast, the Savior warned, “In nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things.”³⁰ I do not think that God is insulted when we forget Him. Rather, I think He is deeply disappointed. He knows that we have deprived ourselves of the opportunity to draw closer to Him by remembering Him and His goodness. We then miss out on Him drawing nearer to us and the specific blessings He has promised.³¹

I invite you to remember each day the greatness of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ and what They have done for you. Let your consideration of Their goodness more firmly bind your wandering heart to Them.³² Ponder Their compassion, and you will be blessed with added spiritual sensitivity and become more Christlike. Contemplating Their empathy will help you “hold out faithful to the end,” until you “are received into heaven” to “dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness.”³³

Our Heavenly Father, referring to His Beloved Son, said, “Hear Him!”³⁴ As you act on those words and listen to Him, remember, joyfully and reverently, that the Savior loves to restore what you cannot restore; He loves to heal wounds you cannot heal; He loves to fix what has been irreparably broken;³⁵ He compensates for any unfairness inflicted on you;³⁶ and He loves to permanently mend even shattered hearts.³⁷

As I have reflected on gifts from our Heavenly Father and from Jesus Christ, I have come to know of Their infinite love and Their incomprehensible compassion for all Heavenly Father’s children.³⁸ This knowledge has changed me, and it will change you too. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.