

Accessing God's Power through Covenants

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As you walk the covenant path, from baptism to the temple and throughout life, I promise you power to go against the natural worldly flow.

Last November, I had the privilege of dedicating the Belém Brazil Temple. It was a joy to be with the consecrated members of the Church in northern Brazil. At that time, I learned that Belém is the gateway to the region that includes the most powerful river in the world, the Amazon River.

Despite the river's strength, twice a year something seemingly unnatural happens. When the sun, moon, and earth are aligned just so, a powerful tidal wave flows up the river, against the natural flow of the water. Waves up to 6 meters high¹ traveling as far as 50 kilometers² upstream have been documented. This phenomenon, known generally as a tidal bore, is referred to locally as *pororoca*, or “great roar,” because of the loud noise it makes. We can correctly conclude that even the mighty Amazon must yield to heavenly powers.

Like the Amazon, we have a natural flow to our lives; we tend to do what comes naturally. Like the Amazon, with heavenly help we can do seemingly unnatural things. After all, it is not natural for us to be humble, meek, or willing to submit our wills to God. Yet only by doing so can we be transformed, return to live in the presence of God, and achieve our eternal destiny.

Unlike the Amazon, we can choose whether we yield to heavenly powers or “go with the flow.”³ Going against the flow may be difficult. But when we yield “to the enticings of the Holy Spirit” and put off the selfish tendencies of the natural man or woman,⁴ we can receive the Savior's transforming power in our lives, the power to do difficult things.

President Russell M. Nelson taught us how to do this. He promised, “Each person who makes covenants in baptismal fonts and in temples—and keeps them—has increased access to the power of Jesus Christ ... [to

lift] us above the pull of this fallen world.”⁵ In other words, we can access the power of God, but only when we connect with Him through sacred covenants.

Before the earth was created, God established covenants as the mechanism by which we, His children, could unite ourselves to Him. Based on eternal, unchanging law, He specified the nonnegotiable conditions whereby we are transformed, saved, and exalted. In this life, we make these covenants by participating in priesthood ordinances and promising to do what God asks us to do, and in return, God promises us certain blessings.⁶

A covenant is a pledge that we should prepare for, clearly understand, and absolutely honor.⁷ Making a covenant with God is different than casually making a promise. First, priesthood authority is required. Second, a feeble promise does not have the connecting strength to lift us above the pull of the natural flow. We make a covenant only when we intend to commit ourselves quite exceptionally to fulfilling it.⁸ We become covenant children of God and inheritors of His kingdom, especially when we identify ourselves completely with the covenant.

The term *covenant path* refers to a series of covenants whereby we come to Christ and connect to Him. Through this covenant bond, we have access to His eternal power. The path begins with faith in Jesus Christ and repentance, followed by baptism and receiving the Holy Ghost.⁹ Jesus Christ showed us how to enter the path when He was baptized.¹⁰ According to the New Testament Gospel accounts in Mark and Luke, Heavenly Father spoke directly to Jesus at His baptism, saying, “Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.” When we embark on the covenant path through baptism, I can imagine Heavenly Father saying a similar thing to each of us: “Thou art my dear child in whom I delight. Keep going.”¹¹

At baptism and when we partake of the sacrament,¹² we witness that we are willing to take on ourselves the name of Jesus Christ.¹³ In this context, let us be mindful of the Old Testament commandment, “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.”¹⁴ To our modern ears, this sounds like a prohibition against irreverently using the Lord’s name. The commandment includes that, but its injunction is even more profound. The Hebrew word translated as “take” means to “lift up” or “carry,” as one would a banner that identifies oneself with an individual or group.¹⁵ The word translated as “vain” means “empty” or “deceptive.”¹⁶ The commandment to not take the Lord’s name in vain can thus mean, “You should not identify yourself as a disciple of Jesus Christ unless you intend to represent Him well.”

We become His disciples and represent Him well when we intentionally and incrementally take on ourselves the name of Jesus Christ through

covenants. Our covenants give us power to stay on the covenant path because our relationship with Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father is changed. We are connected to Them by a covenantal bond.

The covenant path leads to the ordinances of the temple, such as the temple endowment.¹⁷ The endowment is God's gift of sacred covenants that connect us more fully to Him. In the endowment, we covenant, first, to strive to keep the commandments of God; second, to repent with a broken heart and contrite spirit; third, to live the gospel of Jesus Christ. We do this by exercising faith in Him, making covenants with God as we receive the ordinances of salvation and exaltation, keeping those covenants throughout our lives, and striving to live the two great commandments to love God and neighbor. We covenant, fourth, to keep the law of chastity and, fifth, to dedicate ourselves and everything the Lord blesses us with to build up His Church.¹⁸

By making and keeping temple covenants, we learn more about the Lord's purposes and receive a fulness of the Holy Ghost.¹⁹ We receive direction for our lives. We mature in our discipleship so that we do not remain perpetual, unknowing children.²⁰ Rather, we live with an eternal perspective and are more motivated to serve God and others. We receive increased capacity to fulfill our purposes in mortality. We are protected from evil,²¹ and we gain greater power to resist temptation and to repent when we stumble.²² When we falter, the memory of our covenants with God helps us return to the path. By connecting to God's power, we become our own *pororoca*, able to go against the flow of the world, throughout our lives and into the eternities. Ultimately, our destinies are changed because the covenant path leads to exaltation and eternal life.²³

Keeping covenants made in baptismal fonts and in temples also provides us with strength to withstand mortality's trials and heartaches.²⁴ The doctrine associated with these covenants eases our way and provides hope, comfort, and peace.

My grandparents Lena Sofia and Matts Leander Renlund received God's power through their baptismal covenant when they joined the Church in 1912 in Finland. They were happy to be part of the first branch of the Church in Finland.

Leander died from tuberculosis five years later when Lena was pregnant with their tenth child. That child, my father, was born two months after Leander's death. Lena eventually buried not just her husband but also seven of her ten children. As an impoverished widow, she struggled. For 20 years she did not get a good night's rest. During the day, she scrambled to provide food for her family. At night, she took care of dying family members. It is hard to imagine how she coped.

Lena persevered because she knew that her deceased husband and children could be hers through the eternities. The doctrine of temple blessings, including that of eternal families, brought her peace because she trusted in the sealing power. While in mortality, she neither received her endowment nor was she sealed to Leander, but Leander remained a vital influence in her life and part of her great hope for the future.

In 1938, Lena submitted records so that temple ordinances could be performed for her deceased family members, some of the earliest submitted from Finland. After she died, temple ordinances were performed by others for her, Leander, and her deceased children. By proxy, she was endowed, Lena and Leander were sealed to each other, and their deceased children and my father were sealed to them. Like others, Lena “died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, ... [was] persuaded of them, and embraced them.”²⁵

Lena lived as though she had already made these covenants in her life. She knew that her baptismal and sacramental covenants connected her to the Savior. She “let the sweet longing for [the Redeemer’s] holy place bring hope to [her] desolate heart.”²⁶ Lena considered it one of God’s great mercies that she learned about eternal families before experiencing the tragedies in her life. Through covenant, she received the power of God to endure and rise above the depressive pull of her challenges and hardships.

As you walk the covenant path, from baptism to the temple and throughout life, I promise you power to go against the natural worldly flow—power to learn, power to repent and be sanctified, and power to find hope, comfort, and even joy as you face life’s challenges. I promise you and your family protection against the influence of the adversary, especially when you make the temple a major focus in your life.

As you come to Christ and are connected to Him and our Heavenly Father by covenant, something seemingly unnatural happens. You are transformed and become perfected in Jesus Christ.²⁷ You become a covenant child of God and an inheritor in His kingdom.²⁸ I can imagine Him saying to you, “Thou art my dear child in whom I delight. Welcome home.” In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Approximately 20 feet.
2. Approximately 30 miles.
3. We have a choice because God has given us the privilege to choose and act for ourselves. See Guide to the Scriptures, “Agency,” scriptures.ChurchofJesusChrist.org; 2 Nephi 2:27; Moses 7:32.

4. See Mosiah 3:19.
5. Russell M. Nelson, “Overcome the World and Find Rest,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2022, 96, 97.
6. See Guide to the Scriptures, “Covenant,” scriptures.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
7. Everyone stumbles on occasion, but God is patient with our stumbles and has given us the gift of repentance even after breaking a covenant. As Elder Richard G. Scott taught, “The Lord sees weaknesses differently than He [sees] rebellion ... [because] when the Lord speaks of weaknesses, it is always with mercy” (“Personal Strength through the Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2013, 83). Thus, we should not doubt the Savior’s ability to help us with our weaknesses. However, consciously breaking a covenant with the callous plan to repent afterwards—in other words, preplanned sin and repentance—is repugnant to the Lord (see Hebrews 6:4–6).
8. See Robert Bolt, *A Man for All Seasons: A Play in Two Acts* (1990), xiii–xiv, 140.
9. See 2 Nephi 31:17–18.
10. See 2 Nephi 31:4–15.
11. Luke records, “And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22). Mark records, “And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11). William Tyndale’s translation is even more vivid and intimate than the King James Version. In his translation, the voice of Heavenly Father says, “Thou arte my dear Son in whom I delyghte” (in Brian Moynahan, *God’s Bestseller: William Tyndale, Thomas More, and the Writing of the English Bible—A Story of Martyrdom and Betrayal* [2002], 58). Only Matthew reports that the voice was more generally directed, saying, “And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). The Gospel of John reports only of the baptism by John the Baptist: “And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God” (John 1:34).
12. See 2 Nephi 31:13; Doctrine and Covenants 20:77.

13. President Dallin H. Oaks explained the importance of the term “willing” as we renew our baptismal covenant with the sacrament: “It is significant that when we partake of the sacrament we do not witness that we *take upon us* the name of Jesus Christ. We witness that we are *willing* to do so. [See Doctrine and Covenants 20:77.] The fact that we only witness to our willingness suggests that something else must happen before we actually take that sacred name upon us in the most important sense” (“Taking upon Us the Name of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, May 1985, 81). The “something else” refers to temple blessings and future exaltation.
14. Exodus 20:7.
15. See James Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (2010), Hebrew dictionary section, page 192, number 5375.
16. See Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Hebrew dictionary section, page 273, number 7723.
17. Elder David A. Bednar taught: “The baptismal covenant clearly contemplates a future event or events and looks forward to the temple. ... The process of taking upon ourselves the name of Jesus Christ that is commenced in the waters of baptism is continued and enlarged in the house of the Lord. As we stand in the waters of baptism, we look to the temple. As we partake of the sacrament, we look to the temple. We pledge to always remember the Savior and to keep His commandments as preparation to participate in the sacred ordinances of the temple and receive the highest blessings available through the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, in the ordinances of the holy temple we more completely and fully take upon us the name of Jesus Christ” (“Honorably Hold a Name and Standing,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2009, 98). The process is probably not complete until “we shall be like him” (Moroni 7:48), when we have fully been transformed.

18. As explained in the *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 27.2 (ChurchofJesusChrist.org), the covenants are to live the law of obedience, obey the law of sacrifice, obey the law of the gospel of Jesus Christ, keep the law of chastity, and keep the law of consecration; see also David A. Bednar, “Let This House Be Built unto My Name,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2020, 84–87.
19. See Doctrine and Covenants 109:14–15. Elder D. Todd Christofferson taught, “The ‘fulness of the Holy Ghost’ includes what Jesus described as ‘the promise which I give unto you of eternal life, even the glory of the celestial kingdom; which glory is that of the church of the Firstborn, even of God, the holiest of all, through Jesus Christ his Son’ (D&C 88:4–5)” (“The Power of Covenants,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2009, 23, note 5).
20. See Doctrine and Covenants 109:15.
21. See Doctrine and Covenants 109:22, 25–26.
22. See Doctrine and Covenants 109:21.
23. See Doctrine and Covenants 109:15, 22; Russell M. Nelson, “The Power of Spiritual Momentum,” *Liahona*, May 2022, 98.
24. See Russell M. Nelson, “Overcome the World and Find Rest,” 96; Doctrine and Covenants 84:20. Notably, President Nelson said, “Each time you seek for and follow the promptings of the Spirit, each time you do anything good—things that ‘the natural man’ would not do—you are overcoming the world” (“Overcome the World and Find Rest,” 97).
25. Hebrews 11:13.
26. “Redeemer of Israel,” *Hymns*, no. 6, verse 5. This was Lena Sofia Renlund’s favorite hymn.
27. See Moroni 10:30–33.
28. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:19–20.