

Motions of a Hidden Fire

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God hears every prayer we offer and responds to each of them according to the path He has outlined for our perfection.

Brothers and sisters, I have learned a painful lesson since I last occupied this pulpit in October of 2022. That lesson is: if you don't give an acceptable talk, you can be banned for the next several conferences. You can see I am assigned early in the first session of this one. What you can't see is that I am positioned on a trapdoor with a very delicate latch. If this talk doesn't go well, I won't see you for another few conferences.

In the spirit of that beautiful hymn with this beautiful choir, I *have* learned some lessons recently that, with the Lord's help, I wish to share with you today. That will make this a very personal talk.

The most personal and painful of all these recent experiences has been the passing of my beloved wife, Pat. She *was* the greatest woman I have ever known—a perfect wife and mother, to say nothing of her purity, her gift of expression, her spirituality. She gave a talk once titled “Fulfilling the Measure of Your Creation.” It seems to me that she fulfilled the measure of *her* creation more successfully than anyone could have dreamed possible. She was a complete daughter of God, an exemplary woman of Christ. I was the most fortunate of men to spend 60 years of my life with her. Should I prove worthy, our sealing means I can spend eternity with her.

Another experience began 48 hours after my wife's burial. At that time, I was rushed to the hospital in an acute medical crisis. I then spent the first four weeks of a six-week stay in and out of intensive care and in and out of consciousness.

Virtually all my experience *in* the hospital during that first period is lost to my memory. What is *not* lost is my memory of a journey *outside* the hospital, out to what seemed the edge of eternity. I cannot speak fully of that experience here, but I can say that part of what I received was an admonition to return to my ministry with more urgency, more consecration, more focus on the Savior, more faith in His word.

I couldn't help but feel I was receiving my own personal version of a revelation given to the Twelve nearly 200 years ago:

“Thou shalt bear record of my name ... [and] send forth my word unto the ends of the earth. ...

“... Morning by morning; and day after day let thy warning voice go forth; and when the night cometh let not the inhabitants of the earth slumber, because of thy speech. ...

“Arise[,] ... take up your cross, [and] follow me.”¹

My beloved sisters and brothers, since that experience, I have tried to take up my cross more earnestly, with more resolve to find where I can raise an apostolic voice of both warmth and warning in the morning, during the day, and into the night.

That leads me to a *third* truth that came in those months of loss, illness, and distress. It was a renewed witness of and endless gratitude for the resolute prayers of this Church—your prayers—of which I have been the beneficiary. I will be eternally grateful for the supplication of thousands of people who, like the importuning widow,² repeatedly sought heaven’s intervention in my behalf. I received priesthood blessings, and I saw my high school class fast for me, as did several random wards across the Church. And my name must have been on the prayer roll of virtually every temple in the Church.

In my profound gratitude for all this, I join G. K. Chesterton, who said once “that thanks are the highest form of thought; and ... gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder.”³ With my own “happiness doubled by wonder,” I thank all of you and thank my Father in Heaven, who heard your prayers and blessed my life.

Brothers and sisters, I testify that God hears *every* prayer we offer and responds to each of them according to the path He has outlined for our perfection. I recognize that at roughly the same time so many were praying for the restoration of my health, an equal number—including me—were praying for the restoration of my wife’s health. I testify that both of those prayers were heard *and* answered by a divinely compassionate Heavenly Father, even if the prayers for Pat were *not* answered the way I asked. It is for reasons known only to God why prayers are answered differently than we hope—but I promise you they *are* heard and they *are* answered according to His unfailing love and cosmic timetable.

If we “ask not amiss,”⁴ there are no limits to when, where, or about what we should pray. According to the revelations, we are to “pray always.”⁵ We are to pray, Amulek said, for “those who are around you,”⁶ with the belief that the “fervent prayer of a righteous [people] availeth much.”⁷ Our prayers ought to be vocal when we have the privacy to so offer them.⁸ If that is not practical, they should be carried as silent utterances in our heart.⁹ We sing that prayers are “motion[s] of a hidden fire,”¹⁰ always to be offered, according to the Savior Himself, to God the Eternal Father in the name of His Only Begotten Son.¹¹

My beloved friends, our prayers are our sweetest hour,¹² our most “sincere desire,”¹³ our simplest, purest form of worship.¹⁴ We should pray individually, in our families, and in congregations of all sizes.¹⁵ We are to employ prayer as a shield against temptation,¹⁶ and if there be any time we feel *not* to pray, we can be sure that hesitancy does *not* come from God, who yearns to communicate with His children at any and all times. Indeed, some efforts to keep us from praying come directly from the adversary.¹⁷ When we don’t know how or exactly for what to pray, we should begin, and continue, until the Holy Spirit guides us into the prayer we should be offering.¹⁸ This approach may be the one we have to invoke when praying for our enemies and those who despitely use us.¹⁹

Ultimately, we can look to the example of the Savior, who prayed so very, very often. But it has always been intriguing to me that Jesus felt the need to pray at all. Wasn’t He perfect? About what did He need to pray? Well, I have come to realize that He too, with us, wanted to “seek [the

Father's] face, believe his word, and trust his grace."²⁰ Time after time, He retreated from society to be alone before piercing heaven with His prayers.²¹ At other times, He prayed in the company of a few companions. Then He would seek heaven on behalf of multitudes who would cover a hillside. Sometimes prayer glorified His clothing.²² Sometimes it glorified His countenance.²³ Sometimes He stood to pray, sometimes He knelt, and at least once He fell on His face in prayer.²⁴

Luke describes Jesus's descent into His expiation as requiring Him to pray "more earnestly."²⁵ How does one who was perfect pray more earnestly? We assume that all of His prayers were earnest, yet in fulfilling His atoning sacrifice and through the pain that attended its universal reach, He felt to pray ever more pleadingly, with the weight of His offering finally bringing blood from every pore.

Against that backdrop of Christ's victory over death and His recent gift to me of a few more weeks or months in mortality, I bear solemn witness of the reality of eternal life and the need for us to be serious in our planning for it.

I bear witness that when Christ comes, He needs to recognize us—not as nominal members listed on a faded baptismal record but as thoroughly committed, faithfully believing, covenant-keeping disciples. This is an urgent matter for all of us, lest we ever hear with devastating regret: "I never knew you,"²⁶ or, as Joseph Smith translated that phrase, "[You] never knew me."²⁷

Fortunately, we have help for this task—lots of help. We need to believe in angels and miracles and the promises of the holy priesthood. We need to believe in the gift of the Holy Ghost, the influence of good families and friends, and the power of the pure love of Christ. We need to believe in revelation and prophets, seers, and revelators and President Russell M. Nelson. We need to believe that with prayer and pleading and personal righteousness, we really can ascend to "Mount Zion, ... the city of the living God, the heavenly place, the holiest of all."²⁸

Brothers and sisters, as we repent of our sins and come boldly to the "throne of grace,"²⁹ leaving before Him there our alms and our heartfelt supplications, we will find mercy and compassion and forgiveness at the benevolent hands of our Eternal Father and His obedient, perfectly pure Son. Then, with Job and all the refined faithful, we will behold a world "too wonderful"³⁰ to understand. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Doctrine and Covenants 112:4–5, 14.
2. See Luke 18:1–8.
3. G. K. Chesterton, *A Short History of England* (1917), 72.
4. 2 Nephi 4:35.
5. Luke 21:36; see also Alma 13:28; 34:27; Doctrine and Covenants 23:6.
6. Alma 34:27; see also 2 Thessalonians 1:11; Alma 34:21.
7. James 5:16.
8. See Psalm 55:17.

9. See Mosiah 24:10–12; Alma 34:27; 3 Nephi 20:1; Doctrine and Covenants 19:28.
10. “Prayer Is the Soul’s Sincere Desire,” *Hymns*, no. 145.
11. See 3 Nephi 18:19–21.
12. See “Sweet Hour of Prayer,” *Hymns*, no. 142.
13. *Hymns*, no. 145.
14. See Alma 33:3.
15. See Matthew 14:23; 18:19–20; 3 Nephi 18:16, 21–24, 30; Helaman 3:35.
16. See Matthew 6:13; Luke 22:40; 3 Nephi 18:15; Doctrine and Covenants 10:5.
17. See 2 Nephi 32:8; Joseph Smith—History 1:15–16.
18. See Romans 8:26; 3 Nephi 19:24; Doctrine and Covenants 50:30.
19. See Matthew 5:44.
20. *Hymns*, no. 142.
21. See Matthew 14:23.
22. See Matthew 17:2; Mark 9:3; Luke 9:29; 3 Nephi 19:25.
23. See Matthew 17:2; Luke 9:29; 3 Nephi 19:25.
24. See Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:35.
25. Luke 22:44.
26. Matthew 7:23.
27. Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 7:33 (in Matthew 7:23, footnote *a*).
28. Doctrine and Covenants 76:66.
29. Hebrews 4:16.
30. Job 42:3.