

Receiving the Gifts of God

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Good morning, friends! What a blessing it is to be here on this campus that has so many memories for me and my family. Having grown up in a small branch in western New York, I was so grateful for the opportunity to be a student here, where I could be taught by professors who were well versed in their disciplines and in matters of faith. It was here that I made lifelong friends, met my husband, Bruce, and had fun (no details here)!

We are now on our third generation at BYU, as our four children attended here as well as several of their spouses and now two grandchildren.

What a blessing it is for me to serve in Primary! Thank you for inviting the Spirit as you sang “I’m Trying to Be like Jesus.”¹ By a raise of hands, how many of you have a memory of a Primary teacher who loved you or a Primary song that instilled in you your beginning testimony of the Savior? That is the power of Primary.

I invite you to picture yourself walking up a path. At the end of the path is “eternal life.” However, you are looking down at your feet, trudging along, carrying a heavy backpack.

Occasionally you stop, get off track, and stumble, but you trudge on, determined to reach your destination.

Your backpack is labeled “Things to Do.” It is full of lists of things you are trying to do for school and work and to be a good member of the Church. The journey is long, and you feel weighed down because you don’t always remember to do those things you know you should. For example, you offered a ten-second rote prayer as you ran to your first class. You forgot to study your scriptures because you have been writing a term paper. And you can’t think of anyone you have served today.

Now picture what changes when you decide to look up! You see the beauty that surrounds you and feel the warmth of the sun. You remember that the Savior said, “I am the light of the world.”² You remember that He offers you gifts for your journey—gifts such as faith, repentance, hope, and His Spirit. Now, instead of simply trying to put one foot in front of the other as you try to do your duty, you are focused on the Savior. How can you receive His gifts, His knowledge, and His love?

Susan H. Porter, Primary general president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, delivered this devotional address on November 1, 2022.

You realize what you need to receive right now is peace.

You sit down, take off your backpack, and cry out to the Lord, “How can I feel peace?” You remember that peace is a gift that God offers us. You open your scriptures and search for verses that speak of the Savior’s gift of peace. You remember that President Russell M. Nelson promised us peace and rest in his talk in the recent general conference.³ So you go through his talk, looking for his promise of peace and how to *receive* it. No longer are prayer, scripture study, and searching the words of the prophets items on your to-do list—instead, they have become your lifeline for receiving the gifts you need.

My message today is that the gospel of Jesus Christ is a gospel of joy because our Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are inviting us to *receive Them and Their gifts of infinite worth!*

Seeking to receive is not selfish. Perhaps we have always concentrated on the scripture “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”⁴ However, we will have nothing of value to *give* unless we first *receive*.

Receiving the gifts of God is a catalyst for change! A change of heart, a change of countenance, a change of desires, a new birth.

It is remarkable that in the vision of the kingdoms of glory recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 76, the very first quality of those who will inherit the celestial kingdom is that “they are they who *received* the testimony of Jesus.”⁵ The Lord then went on to describe them further: they *received* ordinances, honored covenants, *received* the Holy Spirit, overcame by faith, and, finally, “*received* of his fulness, and of his glory.”⁶

Receiving the gifts of God is a foundational part of becoming a disciple of Christ. As we receive God’s gifts, we receive a portion of Him—His spirit, wisdom, and knowledge. And, like Alma, Enos, and Abish, when we receive gifts from God, we are filled with a desire to share those gifts with others.

The scriptures are filled with gifts that the Lord wants us to receive. As you listen to the beautiful hymn “More Holiness Give Me,” I invite you to ponder on the gifts you would like to receive. [The hymn was performed for the audience.]

*More holiness give me,
More strivings within,
More patience in suff’ring,
More sorrow for sin,
More faith in my Savior,
More sense of his care,
More joy in his service,
More purpose in prayer.*

*More gratitude give me,
More trust in the Lord,
More pride in his glory,
More hope in his word,
More tears for his sorrows,
More pain at his grief,
More meekness in trial,
More praise for relief.*

*More purity give me,
More strength to o’ercome,
More freedom from earth-stains,
More longing for home.
More fit for the kingdom,
More used would I be,
More blessed and holy—
More, Savior, like thee.⁷*

How did you feel as the gifts were listed in the words of the hymn—gifts that can bless your life, gifts that can help you through all the challenges you face? The question is, How can we receive these gifts?

Consider the sun. We can receive a suntan by lying in the sun for a long time (not too long!). The rays of the sun hit our skin, changing the color of the surface. However, receiving a gift from God is not passive. Filled with the desire to receive a gift from God, we do whatever is needful to obtain that gift.

President Henry B. Eyring taught us: “The commandments and covenants He offers you are not tests to control you. They are a gift to lift you toward receiving all the gifts of God.”⁸

A few months ago, a very oversimplified visual of chemical bonds came to mind from my long-ago days of studying chemistry. A small atom of fluorine is unstable because it lacks an electron in its outer shell. It needs to *receive* more

to be complete. Fluorine can form a bond with the larger atom cesium, which has an electron available to share, thus becoming the more stable compound cesium fluoride.

Similarly, as we see our lack and draw near to the Savior, He shares His gifts with us, making us more complete, stable, and whole. When we receive those gifts, our souls are enlarged and changed. We become new creatures, bound to Him. And as we receive sacred ordinances and keep the associated covenants, that bond becomes stronger, giving us more “access to [God’s] strength and redeeming power.”⁹

Today I would like to share three ways in which we might more fully receive the gifts of God:

- Choose humility.
- Look up!
- Receive deeply.

1. Choose Humility

First, choose humility. This time of your life is busy, with lots of pressure—especially now, near the end of the semester. You might also feel stressed spiritually, not being the person you want to be. Seeing our weakness is not a reason to be discouraged; it is a reason to be humble.

Humility opens the way for us to receive our Heavenly Father’s gifts through the enabling power of His Son, Jesus Christ.

A dear friend wrote:

When we found out that our daughter was living a life different than what we thought, it was a huge blow to us. I was filled with feelings of anger, confusion, and all the questions about parenting. The thought came to me that I should fast every Sunday. Now fasting is not one of my strong points. But I was willing to do anything because of the situation. What resulted was miraculous, but not what I expected. The situation I was fasting for did not change, but my heart changed greatly. I felt I could receive the guidance God would give me in the situation, rather than feeling all on my own and blaming myself. I feel like the time I spent fasting for those several weeks was key to getting me to where I am now, which is with an increase of love for our daughter and for the place she has in our family. Because of this

experience, I was able to testify to my seminary students of the blessings we can receive from honoring the fast: “Thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am.”¹⁰

The Savior has said, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”¹¹

The Savior waits at the door of our hearts but will not override our agency. Softening our hearts invites Him in.

The Savior’s gifts are worth every effort it takes to receive them; they have the power to change our souls and enable us to do God’s holy work.

2. Look Up!

Second, look up! Elder Carl B. Cook shared an example of a needed reminder to look up:

At the end of a particularly tiring day toward the end of my first week as a General Authority, my briefcase was overloaded and my mind was preoccupied with the question “How can I possibly do this?” I left the office of the Seventy and entered the elevator of the Church Administration Building. As the elevator descended, my head was down and I stared blankly at the floor.

The door opened and someone entered, but I didn’t look up. As the door closed, I heard someone ask, “What are you looking at down there?” I recognized that voice—it was President Thomas S. Monson.

I quickly looked up and responded, “Oh, nothing.” (I’m sure that clever response inspired confidence in my abilities!)

But he had seen my subdued countenance and my heavy briefcase. He smiled and lovingly suggested, while pointing heavenward, “It is better to look up!” As we traveled down one more level, he cheerfully explained that he was on his way to the temple. When he bid me farewell, his parting glance spoke again to my heart, “Now, remember, it is better to look up.”

As we parted, the words of a scripture came to mind: “Believe in God; believe that he is . . . ; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth.”¹²

What happens when we look up to our Heavenly Father and His Son? If we are too

focused on doing, we may forget to look up, losing focus on the Giver of all heavenly gifts.

When you read the scriptures or listen to talks given at general conference, instead of making a list of all you have been invited to *do*, you could consider first focusing on all the gifts you have been invited to *receive* from a loving Heavenly Father! While studying President Nelson’s recent talk “Overcome the World and Find Rest,” I found more than twenty specific gifts he promised that we can receive: gifts such as greater charity, generosity, kindness, personal revelation, and the ministering of angels.¹³ As we focus on receiving the Savior’s gifts, we will feel joy and purpose as we seek to understand the changes we need to make—and then act.

3. Receive Deeply

Third, receive deeply. While in the forest, Enos wrote that “my soul hungered.”¹⁴ He was prepared to receive deeply. When we experience roadblocks in our life’s journey, our souls, like Enos’s, hunger to receive light, knowledge, and direction.

A former student shared that upon returning to BYU after serving a mission, he became discouraged with his attempts at dating. He said:

I went on dates. I met a lot of girls. I even had a steady girlfriend for a short period. But I was not happy. In fact, I was overwhelmingly frustrated. I found that I was annoyed with the pretension. The “where are you from” and “what’s your major” conversations [we have all had them] became painful to endure. I went through the motions because that is what I thought I was supposed to do.

*After more than a year of floundering . . . , I began to pray in earnest that the Lord would help me find a friend—more specifically, that He would help me find **that** friend, the one I had so painfully longed for.*

One afternoon as I was reading the Doctrine and Covenants, I came across the following verses in section 98:

“Verily I say unto you my friends, fear not, let your hearts be comforted; yea, rejoice evermore, and in everything give thanks;

“Waiting patiently on the Lord, for your prayers have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, and

are recorded with this seal and testament—the Lord hath sworn and decreed that they shall be granted” (Doctrine and Covenants 98:1–2).

[This young man continued,] *I remember so clearly the feeling that I experienced as I read those verses. It was as though God were speaking to me Himself: “Everything is going to be fine. I’ve heard your prayers, and I will answer them.” I don’t recall a time when the scriptures have spoken to me as they did on that day.*

Most heavenly gifts are not seen by others but make a deep impression on our souls. The Prophet Joseph Smith said, “The greatest, the best, and the most useful gifts would be known nothing about by an observer.”¹⁵

Sometimes the gifts of God, such as a change of heart, come quietly, in small increments. As we prayerfully participate in the sacred ordinance of the sacrament each week, our souls can be incrementally purified and sanctified by His holy Spirit.

Every impression, every whispering of the Spirit is a gift. Through those gifts we know that God is aware of us, that He needs us, and that He is walking with us. Those impressions can be the most healing and encouraging of all gifts.

Six years ago, my home was filled with family members who had gathered after the passing of my husband. On the morning of the funeral, one of our sons noticed that water was dripping through the sliding glass door in the bedroom where his family of six was sleeping. We did the best we could to soak up the water, and after everyone had gone home, I found a contractor to figure out the cause. It turned out that it wasn’t just a leaking sliding glass door; there was water damage covering half of the entire back of my home, necessitating the replacement of the stucco and repairs to the deck. How could I move forward with all that needed to be done, I wondered, when I was still striving to simply go through the motions of daily life?

One day the contractor told me to buy four things at a home improvement store to help with repairs. I took the list and drove down that evening to the store. As I got out of the car, I walked into the store behind a couple who were holding

hands. Tenderhearted, I walked into the store to complete my errand. However, it went downhill from there. I was not familiar with the items I was purchasing, and so even when I did find the right aisle, there were many choices, and I had no idea which one to choose.

I went looking for someone to help but couldn't find an employee anywhere. After more than a half hour of fruitless searching, I was near tears. I stepped into an empty aisle, bowed my head, and pleaded for help. I finished my simple prayer and looked around, trying to decide what to do next.

A minute later, around the end of the aisle stepped an employee. She looked at me, smiled, and said, "May I help you?" Her brightness of spirit and knowledge of the store changed everything, and she helped me complete my purchases in about ten minutes.

I drove home and sat pondering. The gift was not what was given but what was received.

Weeks earlier, while Bruce was hospitalized in critical condition, many joined with our family in fasting and prayer for his recovery, but this, we came to know, was not the will of the Lord. After Bruce's passing, I received many gifts, but none more priceless than the knowledge I received on a dark Friday evening in a deserted aisle in Lowe's. There I received a witness to my soul that God was with me and would be with me in the days and years ahead.

The young boy Joseph knelt in a grove of trees seeking to receive wisdom. He chose humility, looked up, and received deeply the knowledge that would initiate the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The greatest blessing of seeking to receive the Savior, His gospel, and His gifts is that as we receive Him, *He will receive us*. Through His great and atoning sacrifice, the Savior broke the bands of death and opened the door for all of us to return to live with God, our Father.

As the Savior told the Nephites after His Resurrection, "Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive."¹⁶

From the oath and covenant of the priesthood, which can be applied to all who make and keep sacred covenants:

*And he that receiveth me receiveth my Father;
And he that receiveth my Father receiveth my
Father's kingdom; therefore all that my Father hath
shall be given unto him.*¹⁷

As you leave this devotional, may you look up to God and seek the gifts you need, especially the gift of knowing that He is with you. I bear witness that as you seek to receive our Heavenly Father, His Son, and Their gifts, there will "not be room enough to receive [them]."¹⁸ In the sacred and holy name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See "I'm Trying to Be like Jesus," *Songbook*, 78–79.
2. John 8:12; John 9:5.
3. See Russell M. Nelson, "Overcome the World and Find Rest," *Liahona*, November 2022.
4. Acts 20:35.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 76:51; emphasis added.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 76:56; emphasis added; see also verses 51–56.
7. "More Holiness Give Me," *Hymns*, 2002, no. 131. The hymn was performed in this devotional by Rachael Anderton, a graduate vocal performance student from Orem, Utah, accompanied on the piano by Renee Gastelum, a senior organ performance major from Morgan Hill, California.
8. Henry B. Eyring, "Legacy of Encouragement," *Liahona*, November 2022.
9. Nelson, "Overcome the World."
10. Isaiah 58:9.
11. Revelation 3:20.
12. Carl B. Cook, "It Is Better to Look Up," *Ensign*, November 2011; quoting Mosiah 4:9.
13. Nelson, "Overcome the World."
14. Enos 1:4.
15. Joseph Smith, "Gift of the Holy Ghost," *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 16 (15 June 1842): 825; *HC* 5:30 (15 June 1842). Quoted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 121.
16. 3 Nephi 9:14; emphasis added.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 84:37–38.
18. Malachi 3:10.