

# *Our Covenant Relationship with God: A Wellspring of Relief*

KRISTIN M. YEE

**M**y dear friends, I am grateful to have this time with you today. I have been thinking about you and the many demands you are balancing alongside your education. And I commend you for your efforts, your good hearts, and your righteous desires. We as a presidency pray for you; we love you. More importantly, we know that our Heavenly Father and Savior love you. They see you, and They know exactly where you are in your journey here on this earth. There is never a time you are not in the forefront of Their minds and in Their hearts. Our loving Savior has declared, “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are *continually* before me.”<sup>1</sup> Your challenges, your interests, your concerns, and your desires are continually before the Lord.

I often find myself pondering upon the blessings and power found in our covenant relationship with God. Today I have felt to share with you five thoughts on the relief that Jesus Christ brings into our lives through our covenant relationship with God.

**First, there is relief in partnering with God. We are never alone.**

Each of you has the opportunity to partner with your Heavenly Father and Savior in deep and powerful ways through your covenant relationship. There is such relief in knowing you are never alone in your sorrows, your challenges, your decisions, your insecurities, or your weaknesses. God, the Father of our spirits, loves you. And through His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, and His atoning sacrifice, all the blessings the Father desires for you are available in this covenant relationship.

When we receive the ordinances and covenants both at baptism and confirmation and in His holy house, we are not *done* learning about covenants and priesthood power. We are not *done* learning about the Lord and His ways. We are not *done* learning about who we really are.

Receiving the ordinances and covenants of the Savior’s gospel is just the beginning. It is not a transactional item on a checklist but the beginning of a beautiful covenant bond.<sup>2</sup> President

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*Kristin M. Yee, second counselor in the Relief Society general presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, delivered this devotional address on October 24, 2023.*

Russell M. Nelson taught, “The covenant path is all about our relationship with God.”<sup>3</sup> Listen to the prophet’s words as He described this covenant relationship and how God desires to bless you:

*Once we make a covenant with God, we leave neutral ground forever. God will not abandon His relationship with those who have forged such a bond with Him. In fact, all those who have made a covenant with God have access to a special kind of love and mercy. In the Hebrew language, that covenantal love is called hesed (חסד). . . .*

*Because God has hesed for those who have covenanted with Him, He will love them. He will continue to work with them and offer them opportunities to change. He will forgive them when they repent. And should they stray, He will help them find their way back to Him.*

*Once you and I have made a covenant with God, our relationship with Him becomes much closer than before our covenant. Now we are bound together. Because of our covenant with God, He will never tire in His efforts to help us, and we will never exhaust His merciful patience with us. Each of us has a special place in God’s heart. He has high hopes for us.<sup>4</sup>*

Can you feel God’s love for you in these words? As a sister who has not yet married, this loving and merciful covenant relationship with my Father in Heaven and the Savior has a powerful place in my life and has been and is my greatest source of relief and peace. It brings me unspeakable comfort, divine joy, and a deep, abiding assurance that I am loved as His daughter and that I belong to His eternal family. I know that He knows me and understands me *completely*.

No matter our marital status or background, the Lord desires us to partner with Him in a powerful way—to “be one”<sup>5</sup> with Him “in all [our] doings.”<sup>6</sup> We don’t need to navigate this life alone, and we weren’t meant to. We can choose to find relief in partnering with the Lord through our covenants.

In the last April general conference, President Camille N. Johnson said:

*Brothers and sisters, I can’t go at it alone, and I don’t need to, and I won’t. Choosing to be bound to my*

*Savior, Jesus Christ, through the covenants I have made with God, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”<sup>7</sup>*

“Jesus Christ is at the *center* of [our] covenant[s].”<sup>8</sup> It is only through Him and His sacrifice that we can make covenants with God. All things became possible when the Savior overcame the impossible. He is “a God of miracles,”<sup>9</sup> a God of love. And my love continues to grow for Him each day.

When we feel His love and reciprocate that love by choosing Him each day, the gospel becomes less about checkboxes and more about love and desire. This allows real gospel roots to grow in each of us, bringing us lasting nourishment and joy. This “covenantal love”<sup>10</sup> helps us to endure when duty or checklists just aren’t enough.

I have reflected on when and where in my life I began to truly partner with the Lord and to invite Him gratefully and intentionally into my daily life and decisions. It was about the time I left home.

Just after my seventeenth birthday, I moved from Burley, Idaho, to San Francisco to go to art school. I had graduated from high school early and was determined to head to the West Coast to go to school and work for Disney. I was living with fifty other girls from around the world in a large mansion that was considered student housing. There were various cultures and lifestyles.

After a few weeks, things felt dark, and I needed the Savior’s light. I sought for assurance that I was known and not just floating out there alone in the world. As I looked for comfort, I reached for my scriptures, and they fell open to the book of Joshua. I read, “Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.”<sup>11</sup> Wherever I went, He would be with me. What a comfort that was and is to my soul!

I then looked for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the phone book (there were no cell phones or smartphones then). There were two listings. One of the church buildings was only several blocks from where I lived. That coming Sunday, I put on my church dress and shoes. I remember a few roommates asking me if I was going to a party.

“It’s a different type of party,” I responded. “I’m going to church.”

Some of those girls ended up taking the missionary discussions.

I walked downhill to a small white church building with palm trees outside and entered the lobby doors. I heard a familiar hymn playing softly: “I Know That My Redeemer Lives.”<sup>12</sup> I was home. I knew this is what I wanted. I knew I wanted my Heavenly Father and Savior in my life more than anything or anyone else. And I began to “counsel with the Lord in all [of my] doings.”<sup>13</sup> I invited Him into my life conversation.

In the words of Abraham, “I said in my heart: Thy servant has sought thee earnestly; now I have found thee.”<sup>14</sup> He is always ready to be found, brothers and sisters. He did not abandon me, nor will He abandon you: “We have made a covenant with Him.”<sup>15</sup>

The Lord lovingly and patiently led me, but not to where I thought I would go. In fact, I went up to Sacramento and then on to Ricks College (now BYU–Idaho)—which was the last place I wanted to go! And the first place my mother had told me to go. And I loved it. I then came to this university. And, interestingly, in my senior year I received an internship and a job with a company that was eventually purchased by Disney. This career came at a time when I had Christ at the center of my life. Because my relationship with God was first, this opportunity gratefully fell into its proper place in my life.

### **Second, there is relief in trusting in the Lord.**

Many times throughout my life, I haven’t known where I was headed or how things would work out. This might sound familiar to you. Through the years, the concerns of the unknown have become secondary to knowing whether or not the Lord was in it. If He was in the decision of where I was or where I was going, I knew He would be beside me to strengthen me and “consecrate [my] afflictions for [my] gain”<sup>16</sup> and my efforts “for the welfare of [my] soul.”<sup>17</sup>

He will do the same for you. As you trust your life to Him, your love for Him will grow. I know that He knows you and that your path is known to Him.

I am reminded of Joseph of Egypt, who, when he was sold into slavery and then later cast into prison, was made prosperous because “the Lord was with Joseph.”<sup>18</sup> You can be in hard circumstances just as Joseph was, and if the Lord is in it with you, you will have His help and you will prosper in the ways you need. So, my friends, stay in the hard a little longer—hang in there a little longer. Lean into the Lord. He trusts you with this experience and growth, and you don’t have to do it alone. He will help you. He sincerely believes in you, my sisters and brothers. And when these challenges come, it’s often time for you to see what He already sees in you. You will gain a deeper understanding of His great love for you.

When you turn the unknowns, the hurt, the complexities, the unfairness, the difficult relationships, and the next steps of your life to His care, He will walk beside you. And through your faith and through His loving sacrifice, He will lead you along and turn your stumbling blocks into stepping stones and make beauty from the ashes of your life.<sup>19</sup> In Alma we read:

*For God is powerful to the fulfilling of all his words.*

*For he will fulfil all his promises which he shall make unto you.*<sup>20</sup>

All the blessings of Jesus Christ’s merciful Atonement are promised through your covenant relationship with God. Take Him up on His desires to bless you! Invest in that relationship, strive to keep your covenants, seek to repent often, spend time with the Lord, learn of Him, and love Him with all your heart. There is no greater pursuit and nothing more fulfilling or meaningful than to “know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Third, we can find the Savior’s relief as we bring His relief to others.**

Mother Teresa often said that the greatest suffering is to feel alone, unwanted, and unloved.<sup>22</sup>

You can find the Savior’s relief from feeling alone and unloved when you bring His relief to others. At times when I have been feeling off or have needed help (which is often), I have felt to go and focus on someone else’s needs. Doing

so has brought the blessings that I didn't know I needed.

In that regard, ministering has been a constant blessing in my life. I am forever grateful for this covenant blessing and responsibility. Each time that I have made an effort to pray for and love those I minister to, I have been blessed deeply and I feel changed. It hasn't been easy. Life is very busy, and at times I don't feel like I have the strength. But if I choose to try to bring the Savior's relief to others, He always helps me to do it. And He provides me with my own relief in return. He will do the same for you. I have seen it time and again and can testify that this is the Lord's loving way—a divine pattern of caring for each other.

As I have mentioned, many times the relief we need is given through those who are around us. And it doesn't always look the way we think it should. As we offer our prayers for help, we also need to be open to *how* He is trying to answer those prayers!

One evening I was trying to put together a message just like this one, and it needed to be delivered soon. But it just wasn't coming. I had prayed for His help but felt as though I was pushing against something.

Just as I was feeling frustrated, my ministering sister texted and said, "Can I stop by right now?"

I thought, "This is *not* the time."

But then another thought quickly came to my mind: "This *is* the time. Let her come."

I held up the white flag and surrendered my efficiency mindset of what I thought I had to do and invited her over.

She came over, and we had a very simple but healing and heartfelt conversation as we sat on my porch. The Spirit poured into our hearts. I felt renewed. I felt His peace, love, and relief. And that was what I really needed, wasn't it? He wanted to calm my heart and, in essence, have a conversation with me. He wanted me to be at peace, be present, feel gratitude, and not worry.

The Lord was trying to answer my prayer by sending this inspired sister to visit me. That was, in a way, a visit from Him, as His Spirit healed my heart. With that relief I was able to receive and write the message that was needed.

Oftentimes we think of true humanitarian work as sending a quilt to a foreign country or traveling to offer aid in disasters. And those are very noble causes. But as President Johnson has said, "Perhaps the best humanitarian outreach is to reach across the fence or across the street."<sup>23</sup>

#### **Fourth, we can find the Savior's relief in our personal relationships.**

One man I met while in Southern California said he didn't always have a great relationship with his Heavenly Father and Savior, but once he started to improve his relationship with God, all the relationships in his life were elevated. In his family, at work, at church, everything was better.

When we develop our covenant relationship with God, all our other relationships are elevated. As we keep our covenants with all our hearts and worship in the house of the Lord, we receive strength and power to navigate and nurture our relationships with increased personal revelation, peace,<sup>24</sup> and divine help. Doing temple and family history work is a potent and powerful way to bring healing and help into our family relationships. Elder Dale G. Renlund has taught, "When ordinances are performed on behalf of the deceased, God's children on earth are healed."<sup>25</sup>

During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, I found myself coming to know and seek the Lord in deeper ways, including through family history. I remember during this time, I felt prompted by the Spirit to go and visit my father in Idaho. I hadn't seen him for a couple of years, and the last time we met, we had left on poor terms. The prompting was to go the next day. I was hesitant, as I knew this would probably open up the possibility for hurt, frustration, anger, and other things I didn't feel like I had the bandwidth to handle at the time. But the prompting was clear, so I messaged my father and said I was coming.

I drove for several hours that next morning. It was Sunday, and at that time the sacrament was being administered in the home, so I planned to take the sacrament while I was there. I remember pulling up in front of my dad's house. He came out quickly and gave me a hug, which took me a little off guard. I then sat quietly in his humble home as he prepared the sacrament bread and

water. We roughly sang a hymn, and then he knelt and offered the prayers.

I remember the moment well: an imperfect person, who was trying, was kneeling and blessing the emblems of the Savior's body and blood. And me, another imperfect person, who was trying, was partaking of the sacred emblems offered. Both seeking to repent, to forgive, and to receive healing. Both renewing and making anew<sup>26</sup> our covenants with God.

After the sacrament, we studied that week's scriptures about Alma the Younger and his change of heart.<sup>27</sup> Then, after dinner and a short walk with my dad, I drove quietly home. I hadn't said much throughout that visit; I felt like an observer as the Spirit interpreted what I was seeing and feeling.

This experience was a small step, a small change in me, that led to a series of other shifts in my life and in that relationship. Things are not perfect yet, but I don't think the Lord is as concerned about that, as much as He is about the status of our hearts, if we are seeking Him and if we are trying. I can feel the Lord caring for my family and helping us one step at a time.

I testify that God loves families. He desires to heal and bless them, to help them grow. As you come closer to God in your covenant relationship, you will feel those small or big promptings of the Spirit to adjust something in your relationships and to do things in such a way that will bring His blessings into your family and other relationships, both here on earth and to those on the other side of the veil.

**Fifth, our covenant relationship with God can be a wellspring of relief.**

As the Savior taught and ministered to the woman at the well, He described a well of water springing up within each of us.

Jesus asked the burdened woman for a drink and said that if she knew who He was, she would have asked Him for a drink, and He would have given her *living* water.

*The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water?*

*Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself . . . ?*

*Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:*

*But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.<sup>28</sup>*

Our Heavenly Father and Savior want to give you an abundance of blessings—a personal well of living water—through your covenants. Covenants unlock priesthood power, which unlocks the blessings of the Savior's Atonement.

President Nelson has taught, "Each person who makes covenants in baptismal fonts and in temples—and keeps them—has increased access to the power of Jesus Christ. Please ponder that stunning truth!"<sup>29</sup>

That power expands the resources and capacities inside you like a wellspring of living water that allows you to navigate and cope with the challenges of life, and even helps you to receive joy amidst the difficulties. That power is manifest through the companionship of His Spirit.<sup>30</sup>

As I've pondered on this personal wellspring within each of us, I thought of something I've seen on many hiking trips in southern Utah. This summer I went on a hike with my sisters through a remote area of Canyonlands. It is a stunning and quiet area with slot canyons, meadows, and needle formations. Throughout this beautiful and somewhat challenging twelve-mile hike, I was particularly drawn to the purpose and function of the dark and bumpy crust that formed along the trails. This is called biological soil crust.<sup>31</sup> And to the wonder of my hiking companions, I spent a good amount of time taking pictures of this fascinating soil.

In reading about the biological soil crust and how it forms—There is cyanobacteria in the soil that is dormant when it is dry. When wet, the bacteria move through the soil and leave behind sticky fibers that form a web that joins the soil particles together. This creates a thickened layer of soil crust. The crust controls erosion so sediments don't wash away in the rain or blow away with the

wind. That is why this area is not covered with loose sand dunes.

This crust layer also acts like a sponge, absorbing and storing water for plants to tap into so they can survive the dry and hot conditions. Over time, other organisms grow into the soil as well, and together they create a continuous living crust that supports desert life. This unsuspecting and seemingly simple living crust provides powerful ways to sustain life in a place where there should be *no* life! And yet it sustains plants, wildlife, and even people. What an incredible creation!

The crust, though powerful in its ability to sustain life, is also very delicate and can easily be crushed and killed by a human step. Soil crust takes time to develop, and a mature crust can take fifty years to strengthen.<sup>32</sup>

Just as this continuous living crust sustains life and provides relief, our covenant relationship with God creates a personal life-giving ecosystem that can nourish us and those around us amidst the dry deserts of our lives.

How is that possible? Through the living waters of Jesus Christ, His Atonement. As we keep our covenants with God, we receive His priesthood power—the power of His Atonement—which expands our capacities like an endless wellspring of water. We receive greater capacity to problem-solve, greater capacity to feel and rely upon divine love and validation, greater capacity to resist sin, greater capacity to receive peace and joy, greater strength to endure, greater capacity to repent and grow, greater capacity for patience, and greater capacity to receive guidance and protection.

Your covenant bond with God will grow and increase just as the living soil crust does year after year; it takes time to develop. And it will bless others because that is what the love of God and the Savior's Atonement does. They bring life and growth to a dim and dying world. They bring joy and hope to a depressed heart.

I have witnessed this in my life. As my covenant relationship strengthens, so does my capacity to love God with all my heart and to do His will.

This relationship is both life-sustaining and self-sustaining. Just as the soil crust grows steadily despite harsh conditions, your relationship with God can develop steadily despite harsh

worldly conditions. In your covenant relationship you will find relief from worldly expectations and validation. As your relationship with God develops and grows, so does your spiritual ecosystem, and your soil crust will thicken and become resistant to the world's erosive effects. You will not be blown away by every wind of temptation or washed away by social trends. Nor will you be without water and nourishment during the hot and dry spells of adversity that will come into your life.

In your protective covenant relationship with God, He will help you to repent, to resist temptation, and to create life-sustaining sanctuaries in your life where there is nourishing peace, forgiveness, healing, safety, and growth.

God prospers us in our deserts. With God we can prosper in the desert; without God, even in a fertile land, we ultimately cannot prosper.

It is interesting that God shows us many times throughout scripture a people being led and sustained in barren lands, wildernesses, and deserts—Abraham and Sarah, Moses and the children of Israel, Nephi and Lehi with their families traveling through the wilderness, the early Saints traveling west to this desert in which we now live.

Why the contrast of life in a barren land? I think the Lord wants to show us that it is by His power and His love for us that we can have life both spiritually and temporally, even in the most difficult of circumstances. He wants us to exercise our faith in Him, to grow and receive a greater joy. It is less about our circumstances and all about our covenant relationship with God. True stability comes from faith in our Savior, Jesus Christ. He is our ultimate Provider and Relief.

In closing, I would like to share what our prophet has said:

*If you and I are to withstand the forthcoming perils and pressures, it is imperative that we each have a **firm** spiritual foundation built upon the rock of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. . . .*

*The temple lies at the center of strengthening our faith and spiritual fortitude because the Savior and His doctrine are the very heart of the temple. . . . His essential ordinances bind us to Him through sacred priesthood covenants. Then, as we keep our covenants, He*

endows us with **His** healing, strengthening power. And oh, how we will need His power in the days ahead.<sup>33</sup>

I love going to the house of the Lord to receive relief from the world.

I would invite you to go as often as you can to His holy house to learn of Him, to receive of His love, and to be armed with His priesthood power.<sup>34</sup> Times will continue to come where we will need to exercise greater faith in the Savior. And we can prepare by choosing Him today, even in the small things, by keeping our covenants and by bringing His relief to others.

If you have not received the blessings of the house of the Lord yet, I invite you to study about the blessings of temple covenants and priesthood power and what God desires for you. These blessings were meant for *you!* God wants all of His children, each and every one, “to enjoy the blessings of His covenant”<sup>35</sup> and to return home to His presence. Don’t wait<sup>36</sup> to receive His loving relief, power, and help.

President Nelson has said:

*If I could speak to each man or woman who longs for marriage but has not yet found his or her eternal companion, I would urge you not to wait until marriage to be endowed in the house of the Lord. Begin **now** to learn and experience what it means to be armed with priesthood power.*

*And to each of you who has made temple covenants, I plead with you to seek—prayerfully and consistently—to understand temple covenants and ordinances. Spiritual doors will open. You will learn how to part the veil between heaven and earth, how to ask for God’s angels to attend you, and how better to receive direction from heaven.*<sup>37</sup>

What powerful blessings await us! Our Heavenly Father desires to bless you, brothers and sisters. He loves you and desires your happiness and peace. He desires to bless you through your covenants. The blessings of a covenant relationship are yours as you choose Jesus Christ and His unfailing relief.

I testify that Jesus Christ lives. He is the Only Begotten Son of the Father. He came to this earth, suffered unimaginable pain and anguish, and died

for you and me, that through Him we could be redeemed and truly be made free if we repent. The covenants and ordinances of His gospel have been restored upon the earth. I know our Father in Heaven loves you and the Savior and Redeemer of the world stands ready to bless you. I testify of these things in His name, Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. Isaiah 49:16; 1 Nephi 21:16; emphasis added.
2. See Dale G. Renlund, “Accessing God’s Power Through Covenants,” *Liahona*, May 2023.
3. Russell M. Nelson, “The Everlasting Covenant,” *Liahona*, October 2022.
4. Nelson, “Everlasting Covenant.”
5. 3 Nephi 19:23.
6. Alma 37:37.
7. Camille N. Johnson, “Jesus Christ Is Relief,” *Liahona*, May 2023; quoting Philippians 4:13.
8. Nelson, “Everlasting Covenant”; emphasis in original.
9. Mormon 9:11; see also verses 11–21.
10. Nelson, “Everlasting Covenant.”
11. Joshua 1:9.
12. See “I Know That My Redeemer Lives,” *Hymns*, 2002, no. 136.
13. Alma 37:37.
14. Abraham 2:12; see also verses 8–12.
15. Nelson, “Everlasting Covenant.”
16. 2 Nephi 2:2.
17. 2 Nephi 32:9.
18. Genesis 39:2; see also verses 1–3.
19. See Isaiah 61:3; see also Kristin M. Yee, “Beauty for Ashes: The Healing Path of Forgiveness,” *Liahona*, November 2022.
20. Alma 37:16–17.
21. John 17:3.
22. See *The Letters* (2014), a biographical film about Mother Teresa.
23. Camille N. Johnson, BYU Women’s Conference evening address, 3 May 2023.
24. See Russell M. Nelson, “First Presidency Message: As We Go Forward Together,” *Ensign*, April 2018.
25. Dale G. Renlund, “Family History and Temple Work: Sealing and Healing,” *Ensign*, May 2018.

26. In an endnote in his October 2019 general conference talk, Elder Dale G. Renlund shared the following:

*In the mission leadership seminar in June 2019, after partaking of the sacrament, before beginning his formal message, President Russell M. Nelson said: “A thought has occurred to me that my making a covenant today is a lot more important than the message that I have prepared. I made a covenant as I partook of the sacrament that I would be willing to take upon me the name of Jesus Christ and that I am willing to obey His commandments. Often, I hear the expression that we partake of the sacrament to renew covenants made at baptism. While that’s true, it’s much more than that. I’ve made a new covenant. You have made new covenants. . . . Now in return for which He makes the statement that we will always have His Spirit to be with us. What a blessing!” [Endnote 18 in Renlund, “Unwavering Commitment to Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, November 2019; see also Nelson, quoted in David A. Bednar, “That We May Always Remember Him,” *Liahona*, June 2023]*

27. See Mosiah 27; see also Alma 36.

28. John 4:11–14; see also verses 5–10.

29. Russell M. Nelson, “Overcome the World and Find Rest,” *Liahona*, November 2022.

30. See D. Todd Christofferson, “The Power of Covenants,” *Ensign*, May 2009.

31. See “Biological Soil Crust of Southeast Utah,” U.S. National Park Service, [nps.gov/articles/seug-soil-crust.htm](https://www.nps.gov/articles/seug-soil-crust.htm).

32. See “Biological Soil Crust of Southeast Utah.”

33. Russell M. Nelson, “The Temple and Your Spiritual Foundation,” *Liahona*, November 2021; emphasis in original.

34. See 1 Nephi 14:14.

35. Nelson, “Everlasting Covenant.”

36. See “Deciding When to Receive the Endowment,” *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, August 2022 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ, 2022), 27.2.2 (p. 230).

37. Nelson, “The Temple and Your Spiritual Foundation”; emphasis added.