

Surprise!

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Good morning, BYU students! It is an absolute joy to join you today in your devotional, to share my testimony of Jesus Christ, and to add my lower light to yours!¹ But it is also a bit of a surprise to be here. My husband was given this assignment at the end of last week. He may tell you a bit more about that and about some other surprises that have unfolded in our lives recently. And I was meant to be in St. George today with three of my besties. But, surprise! Here I am instead! And actually, so are my friends. They didn't go to St. George without me. They are truly the best of the best.

When unexpected things happen, we often say with a bit of a shrug, "Life is full of surprises!" Or "Life threw me a curve ball!" Or, in the famous words of Forrest Gump, "Life [is] like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get."² And isn't that the case?

Generally speaking, the human mind doesn't like surprises. It prefers order. We like routine,

stability, and predictability. We like to know whom and what we can count on. We make nice, neat plans for our lives, and we assume things will go a certain way—the way we have envisioned, the way we think is best.

And then, surprise! Things don't go that way.

In some cases, the surprises that come into our lives are wonderful! Just what we needed! Huge blessings! Amazing!

At other times, surprises spring upon us in a shocking, unwelcome jolt, bringing with them difficult and even disastrous consequences.

Either way, good or bad, surprises cause us to pivot, recalibrate, modify, and adapt. You may be in the middle of navigating some surprising twists and turns in your life right now, and you won't be alone.

So, two scriptures come to mind. First, the words of the Lord in Doctrine and Covenants 90:24:

Jennifer Kearon, wife of Elder Patrick Kearon, delivered this devotional address on September 17, 2024.

Search diligently, pray always, and be believing, and all things shall work together for your good, if ye walk uprightly and remember the covenant.

Second, the words of the Lord in the New Testament. In Matthew 7:7, the Lord commands us to ask, seek, and knock and then promises to answer. Next He asks:

What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

If ye then, being evil [meaning being human and imperfect], know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?³

In these two scriptures, Jesus teaches important principles that can help us increase our faith, trust, and resilience when surprises come our way.

Maybe you feel as if you asked for bread and you planned on bread, but, surprise, it appears God has given you a stone.

Well, in these verses Jesus is promising that all things will work together for your good⁴ because the Father *only* gives bread, never stones. (I thank Brother S. Michael Wilcox for this concept.⁵) Think about that. All things, even the surprises, will eventually be for your good. Because why? Because God only gives bread, never stones, in answer to your petitions.

However, it's important not to disconnect the promises from the prerequisite conditions upon which those promises can be granted. It's disingenuous of us to suppose that we could expect God to cause all things to work together for our good if *we* fail to diligently search, pray, believe, and keep our covenants.

But as we do our part, the promises here from the Lord are astonishing! Even—might we say—surprising! Can we open our hearts and fully accept that these promises are real and powerful?

Many of us spend a lot of our time and energy worrying when a surprise unfolds in our lives. We fret, we question God, we doubt ourselves, and it paralyzes us. Believe these promises are for you, increase your faith and trust, and fall into His hands. He has got you.

You may have a certain “surprise” in your life come to mind that is definitely *not* bread. It is in fact a stone—the sharpest, heaviest, most crushing boulder you’ve ever encountered. But even so, as you turn to Him with faith, trust, and patience, in time God will help you see the ways He has changed you and how much better you have come to know Him. Truly, through His power, what once appeared to be a stone has miraculously turned out to be bread, and it has all worked together for your good.

Some of God’s surprises are wonderful, some confusing, some difficult to navigate, and some perfectly heartbreaking. But hold on to Him through it all. If you have eyes to see and if you choose faith, He will surprise *you* with His goodness and love. He will surprise you with His wisdom and foresight. He will surprise you with His miracles and His perfect divine design for your life. He really is that good.

So, surprise God right back! I guess technically we can’t surprise God because He is omniscient. But just go with this idea. Surprise God right back! Surprise Him with your faith. Surprise Him with your loyalty—to Him and to His prophets. Surprise Him with your worship—privately at home, publicly at church, and in His holy house as often as you can get there. Surprise Him with your persistent repentance—don’t you give up. Surprise Him with your joyful, consecrated life. Surprise Him with your choice to choose Him always, because He always chooses you. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See “Brightly Beams Our Father’s Mercy,” *Hymns*, 2002, no. 335.

2. IMDb’s page for quotes for *Forrest Gump* (1994), [imdb.com/title/tt0109830/quotes/?ref_=tt_trv_qu](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0109830/quotes/?ref_=tt_trv_qu).

3. Matthew 7:9–11.

4. See Gerrit W. Gong, “All Things for Our Good,” *Liahona*, May 2024.

5. See S. Michael Wilcox, “Bread or Stones: Understanding the God We Pray to,” BYU–Hawaii devotional address, 31 March 2009.