

# *“Out of Small Things Proceedeth That Which Is Great” (D&C 64:33)*

CHERYL BROWN

I really appreciate so many of my friends and family and loved ones being here. I'm really touched by you being here. I have known for about two months that I would be giving this talk. I have to admit that that is about two months too long. I have always been in favor of having the periods of terror in my life be as short as possible. In reality, however, these two months have allowed me to think about who might be in this audience and what I could possibly say that would be of benefit. I've thought of you, the young adult students with so much of the road of life before you; I've thought of you less-traditional students, those who have returned after time away from formal education; and I've thought of us, the faculty, staff, and other adults who have traveled a little farther down the road. And I've thought about what we could learn together. I ask you now for your prayers in my behalf and your own behalf that what I say will be of value.

As President Lee mentioned, I grew up the youngest of ten children. Being youngest in any family has both its advantages and its disadvantages, as I very quickly found out. One advantage is that you're spoiled, and your parents think you're a darling. One disadvantage is that you're spoiled, and the rest of the world

(including your siblings) think you're anything but a darling. Another advantage is that less is generally expected of you because you are younger than everyone else in the household. Another *dis*advantage is that less is generally expected of you because you are younger than everyone else in the household. I distinctly remember thinking when I was quite young, before I was eight, that there was a real possibility that the idea of growing up was a fiction—something like the Easter bunny or the tooth fairy, something that adults told children that wasn't really real. I remember thinking about growing up and noticing, even though people told me I was getting bigger, that there never seemed to be a closing of the gap. I never seemed to gain on anyone—my brothers and sisters were ever bigger than I was and always more capable. Just as I would finally be able to do something, they were able to do even more and greater things. I was always too young or too little to do the things that they were doing.

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It seemed that I would never be able to do anything important, anything significant.

And I remember that I wanted to do something important, something significant. I wanted to do something that would make a difference. I knew very soon that there were people who had made a difference in the world. As I grew, I read books, including almost all the juvenile biographies our public library had to offer, and I found inspiration from the stories of George Washington, Florence Nightingale, Abraham Lincoln, Clara Barton, etc. I went to movies and thrilled as Joan of Arc or Robin Hood or even one of the cowboy heroes fought against odds for high and noble causes.

I listened to teachers in church, and I knew that it made a difference that David was not afraid to face Goliath while King Saul and the hosts of Israel cowered in their tents, trying to figure out what to do. I knew that it mattered that Esther put her life on the line in order to reveal the treachery of Haman and make it possible for the Jews to defend themselves against the total destruction Haman had planned. And I knew that it made a great deal of difference that one fourteen-year-old boy went into the woods by himself on a lovely spring morning and, in faith, asked an honest question, and then spent the rest of his life being true to the answer he received. I knew that I wanted to make a difference, too.

I mention these things neither to ridicule nor to glorify my childhood dreams, but because I think they were normal. I suspect and hope that many, if not all of you, have had such dreams or desires at some point in your lives, and that you also have wanted to do something important, something significant, something that would really make a difference. I think such desires are natural in all of us who are children of God, and I pray today that such desires have not left even though they may now take a more adult form. I hope they have not left, because I want to talk about really

making a difference, really doing something significant. As I have grown up and gone about my adult life, I have come to some new understandings about this issue. It's what I wish to talk about today so that maybe some can learn sooner or faster or better than I have, so that maybe we can all be reminded of the sweetness and the rightness and hope that comes from good dreams, and so that we can maybe reflect one more time and appreciate the great difference the Savior made through his life and atonement. I also hope that we can recognize that, through his atonement, he has made it possible for each one of us, too, to make a significant difference.

I wish to base my talk about doing something great on a scripture found in D&C 64:33. It reads: "Wherefore, be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great." I'd like to begin my discussion of this scripture by asking you to consider if it really is true that things which are great proceed out of small things. I think, if we think about it, we will recognize that, in many ways, this idea is in contradiction to what the world thinks or teaches. The world expects great things to proceed out of *great* things. People must rant and rave and shout to cause change. Wars must be fought, arms assembled, summit meetings held. And certainly the media must record it for the world to see.

The Lord, however, works quietly, behind the scenes, through unfailing laws of truth. Individuals come, one by one, to the support of what is right. Small economic pressures or forces of nature or minor events come to bear, and something "great" occurs—and people wonder how things came to be. They chip away and carry pieces of the Berlin Wall home, but they somehow know that it was not their hammers or chisels that made the wall fall. Something great has proceeded out of many small things that the media could not or did not record.

I have three other examples that have struck me and have taught me very forcefully that great things come out of small things. One of the examples is used fairly commonly these days. It is the Salt Lake Temple. A month or so ago, I visited the exhibit on the temple at the Church History Museum in Salt Lake. Like many of you, I marveled at the perseverance and ingenuity of those who engaged in the building of the temple, but I know that one of the things that most struck me about the temple building was not the construction itself. I couldn't help but notice the Salt Lake City that surrounded the work of the temple—I noticed the little houses, the businesses, the streets, the general smallness and the bareness.

I thought of the lives of the people who were building this temple—the farmers with horse-drawn ploughs (if they were lucky enough to have a horse) clearing off sagebrush lands, starting to make them productive. I thought of housewives in adobe houses doing their washes, tending their children, feeding and clothing their families. I thought of businessmen trying to conduct business far from financial and industrial centers.

I read what the press said when the temple was done. Yes, the newspapers recognized that indeed something great had been accomplished, and they marveled about it. They didn't mention cracked blocks that had to be replaced, broken axles on ox carts moving the granite blocks, tools dulled and sharpened again and again, canals built and abandoned, individual homes whose building was delayed—and, yet, it was out of these small things that the great thing that they praised had proceeded.

A few years ago I had another experience that helped me recognize my own blindness to what small things had produced. For one of my research projects I had to go down to Colonia Juarez, one of several communities built in the last century by Latter-day Saints in northern Mexico. A friend of mine from Colonia Juarez picked me up in El Paso, Texas,

and drove me to her community. During the drive we crossed a lot of desert area of the kind that would almost seem a caricature for west Texas and northern Mexico—sand, dirt, cactus, an occasional little pueblo with adobe buildings, broken-down-looking cars, and only one paved road, which was the highway we were on. Everything seemed hot and dirty. After about four hours the road started to descend and curve a little more, and, as we came around a bend, suddenly, there was Colonia Juarez. I was stunned. There were beautiful fruit orchards, brick homes with lovely yards, water running in ditches by the side of the streets, plenty of shade trees. If I had not known where I was, I would have sworn that I was in one of many small towns I was familiar with in Utah. Everything looked like it. And then I realized that the small towns and big cities in Utah were as much a surprise and a wonder, not because of their smallness or quaintness (as some of you more sophisticated types may think) but because they, just like Colonia Juarez, had been wrested out of the desert. Something great had proceeded out of the small, forward-looking acts of many—a true miracle had been produced.

My final story of great things which proceeded out of small things is a personal story out of Chile. I served a mission in Chile twenty-five years ago. This past July I had the opportunity to return to Chile for about six months on a Fulbright grant. It was fun for me to see the economic growth and strength that the country had gained. But it was phenomenal to be able to observe firsthand the growth of the Church. When I left Chile the first time, there were zero stakes. When I left this time, there were more than fifty-five. When I arrived in Chile the first time, there were about 16,000 members. When I arrived this time, there were well over 100,000 members.

But the thing that struck me most personally was not the quantitative growth, but the qualitative growth that I observed. I had a

chance to look up some of the people I had known in Chile twenty-five years before. I visited people we had taught who had never been baptized. I visited people who were baptized and had fallen away. I visited people who were baptized and had come and gone in their activity. And I visited people who were baptized and had stayed active, filling missions themselves or, if older, sending their children on missions, marrying in the temple, serving where they were called. And I saw the difference. It was as if I had been given the opportunity to observe the results of a longitudinal experiment with four treatment groups where I could see what a difference a certain treatment makes, what a difference small things, small variables make. I saw the personal peace and depth of character and happiness of the always active members. I saw the strength of their families and the advantages that had come to their children because of it. I saw their magnified capacities and how these capacities had blessed them in their church work and also in their employment. I saw how they had risen temporally, intellectually, and spiritually. I literally saw the fruits of the gospel in their lives, the great things that had proceeded out of small things—all out of the decision to be baptized, out of the decision or decisions to stay active, out of following the counsel of leaders, out of serving. I saw the great things that resulted: greatness in character, peace, and happiness here. And I believe that even greater things are to come in the hereafter. I know from them that small things make a difference.

And now I'd like to discuss *what* small things we all might work with in order to make a difference in our lives and in significant matters. One of them has been well illustrated by what I found in Chile. It is the small decision to trust and believe the Lord.

A few years back I had a very bright former student who was struggling with her testimony. She somehow felt that she had never received an overwhelming answer to her

prayers about the Church. As I talked with her, trying to help her, she said something that has struck me over and over since then with its simplicity and truth. She said something like, "Yes, there are many logical reasons to think that the Church is good, but eventually everyone who believes it is true does it on faith; he or she has to choose to believe."

What she said is true; sooner or later everyone has to choose to believe or not. We have to choose to recognize the sweetness of the Spirit that comes when we think about the Church being true. We have to acknowledge, when we pray and ask the Lord if the Church and the Book of Mormon are true, that the thought that we already know that they are comes from the Being who knows our thoughts. We have to admit that, indeed, we do know they are true.

But the decision to believe does not have to be done without plenty of evidence either. After my former student said what she did, I examined my life to see why I believed. I found numberless occasions of real joy and happiness associated with following the teachings of the Church. I realized that, even if I had not had a great confirmation of peace from the Spirit about the truthfulness of the Church, I would still choose to believe and follow simply because it makes me happy. I also recognized that I had never met anyone who had derived real happiness and peace out of wrong choices. I had known several who had tried, many of whom had claimed to be happy. Several of them had later confessed in tears—as they dealt with the consequences of their choices—that they had lied in their claims, that they had been fooled by the father of lies himself. I know that the decision to believe in the Church and the gospel is a small thing out of which great things proceed and that the choice or choices not to believe bring sorrow.

But I think there is more than just the decision to believe in the Church and the gospel that we must make if great things are to proceed. We must also choose to trust what the

Lord says and understand that it applies to us. I had an experience growing up that I have recounted in other places and that I am going to repeat here because it illustrates what I am trying to say.

About as soon as I learned to read, I remember encountering on the bedroom door of my brother, who was about ten years older than I, a sign that read, “Keep out! This means you.” I remember that I found the sign puzzling. Who could my brother possibly be trying to keep out of his bedroom? The bedroom was in the farthest corner of the basement, and none of the neighbor kids ever seemed to go down there. I could not think, as I went in and out of my brother’s bedroom whenever I pleased, who he could possibly mean. It wasn’t until many years later, when I myself was in my teens and saw the sign again, that it suddenly dawned on me for whom it was intended. The sign had done absolutely no good in my case because I did not realize that it was intended precisely for me.

Many of us are like that with the teachings of the gospel. We know the gospel is true, but we don’t think individual teachings apply directly to us or our circumstances. For example, we don’t trust that the Lord will “open [us] the windows of heaven, and pour [us] out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it,” and that he “will rebuke the devourer for [our] sakes” (Malachi 3:10–11) if we honestly pay our tithing. We think that promise is for people who are not having financial troubles as we are.

Or we don’t believe that honestly keeping the Sabbath has anything to do with things that “please the eye,” “gladden the heart,” “strengthen the body,” and “enliven the soul” (see D&C 59:18–19)—and, yet, these things are promised along with the ability to keep ourselves “unspotted from the world” (see D&C 59:9). We think that keeping the Sabbath applies only for the length of the three-hour meeting block or to people who don’t have as

much to do as we do. We don’t choose to take the Lord at his word.

I love the story that Parley P. Pratt tells in his autobiography of how he took the Lord at his word. Parley went through the Bible picking out all of the blessings that the Lord had promised to those who followed him. Parley wrote the blessings, each on a piece of paper, put them in a box, and carried them with him, calling them his “treasure,” because he counted the blessings the same as already given. He was absolutely sure they would follow. Parley did this before he heard of the Restoration. Later, he trusted the blessings that the Restoration offered and chose to be baptized and to follow—a small decision that was the key to big blessings for him. The decision to believe the gospel and to trust the word of the Lord in all things is a small thing for us, but it, too, will be the key to big blessings for us.

Another small thing, another particular decision to trust the Lord, that I would like to talk about is the decision to repent. We need to be careful not to hide our sins without taking care of them, not to ignore the repentance process. I have found that one of the biggest obstacles I have to overcome in order to repent is my own pride. It really does demand humility to recognize that we have need to repent. Yet the scriptures tell us, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). We sometimes have a tendency to think that what we have done is not very bad. We pile our shortcomings up and measure them against what we see as the shortcomings and faults of our neighbors, our roommates, our husbands and wives, our fellow ward members, and we think we look pretty good. But, if we are really honest with ourselves and look at what the Lord sees, we recognize that we are “weighed in the balance . . . and found wanting” (Daniel 5:27). Our path to perfection must lie through a series of “small” repentances, but we never get on that path unless we are willing to admit that we have done less than right or

good, that we have done wrong. So it is a small but significant thing to seek honestly to see our sins and overcome them.

I know from my own experience that the Holy Ghost can help immensely in this process. If we ask, he will reveal to us our sins—not in one big lump so that we are completely overwhelmed and discouraged by our faults, but one by one at the right moments and in the right proportions as we are able to deal with them. He will help us from where we are to where we need to go. Here, once again, the matter of trust enters in. We need to trust that our baptism is an everlasting covenant and that, at the point we recognize and repent of our sins, we will be cleansed.

The sacrament is given to us every week—a small thing to keep us reminded of the baptismal covenant and its eternal nature and to help us in the repentance process. Out of this small thing can come very good things for our growth. I would like to pass on to you something that I was taught in my youth by a very good seminary teacher, Brother Boyd Beagley. It's a small application of the sacrament that has blessed my life repeatedly and immeasurably.

Brother Beagley suggested that rather than thinking each week as the sacrament is passed, "I'm sorry for all the bad things I've done and I'll try to do better," we should seriously examine ourselves and think of specific things we have done during the past week that might be a cause of grief to the Lord who spilled his blood for us. We should evaluate not only actions, but also thoughts and attitudes since the last time we took the sacrament.

If we are truly humble and seek his help, the Holy Ghost will help us in selecting from among our shortcomings or faults the one thing we most need to work on during the coming week. We may move on to something new each week, or we may find that we will keep working on the same thing for several weeks in a row. On other occasions we will find ourselves circling back to recurring faults

and our greatest weaknesses. Whatever the Spirit reveals to us as the thing that is most displeasing to the Lord, we should commit ourselves to working on. We then should think of possible times and circumstances that may arise in the coming week that may lead us into temptation in the area, and plan ahead for ways to avoid or overcome the temptation. Then we take the sacrament, reaffirming our part of the covenant and asking that we may always have the Lord's spirit to be with us. During the week we do the very best we can; we make our best efforts in the selected area of weakness. When we come to the sacrament table the next week, we reexamine ourselves. Here again the Spirit tells us what we need to work on. He also allows us to feel forgiven when we have honestly overcome. Once again, we must choose to trust the Lord. We need to remember that he has said, "He who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more" (D&C 58:42). We do not need to drag our burdens around with us, never forgiving ourselves, thinking we are no good, too weak for the Lord to love and forgive. We should remember that the Lord blesses not necessarily because we are good and totally worthy, but because he is good and totally worthy. This whole process is really a small thing, but I testify from my own life that it makes a real difference. I sincerely advocate these two small things: really trusting in the Lord and honestly repenting every week.

And now I come to the final question I would like to address: What great things proceed out of these two small things? I believe that literally they can take a natural man or woman and change him or her into a man or woman of Christ. It is no small thing to turn a regular person into something godly. Our work may never be written up in the media; the world may never put what we have done on any of its "Top Ten" lists. But we have much better evidence that what we are doing is significant: This is the work in which he who is

the greatest of all, who understands the real worth of all things, who could be engaged in any work he desires, this is the very work in which he is engaged. “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). We can let lesser causes lure us away from this significant work or we can do this larger work in the Lord’s specified quiet ways and know that it does make a difference, eternities without end.

Several years ago I read a newspaper article about a famous movie director. The article had a quote from the director in it that I believe and that has stayed in my mind even though I cannot remember who the director was (although many people to whom I have recited the quote tell me that it was probably Frank Capra). The director said, “Character is destiny.” I believe that. I believe that what we are will “out,” that eventually our fatal flaws or quietly developed strengths will have consequences, that our final destiny will depend not just on what we have done, noticed or not, but on what we have become, who we have become. And I believe that it is by small things that we become something or someone great.

I also think that doing these small things makes a difference in what happens in our larger society. I think it makes a difference in what gets passed down to our children. If we do these small but righteous things, we will be giving them a better world and a broader view of truth and eternity. It honestly does make a difference for society, now and in the future, if we personally do the small things that help raise language from the gutter; that allow our neighborhoods to be safe without lock and key; that stop abuses of all kinds from being passed on to new generations—if we make kindness, sensitivity, and sacrificing love the norms.

I believe that the small things I have been talking about can eventually lead to something really great for all of us, something long foretold and wished for by prophets and saints of all dispensations. I sincerely believe that we can

peestablish Zion, the city of the pure in heart, the city of those who have washed their sins in the blood of the Lamb, person by person, sin by sin.

My last visit to Chile allowed me to see something else besides just the individual results that had come into the lives of people. It allowed me to see how society changes when individuals change. For example, I could see the kind of growth and society that existed in areas where the Church had now been for several decades. It was a different society than it was even when I was there twenty-five years ago. Things were better; expectations were higher. In the areas where the Church had not been, I saw how society still operated the unkindnesses, the pettinesses, the blatant dishonesty. And then I returned here—a place that has grown up with the influence of the Church and its teachings for several generations. As I look around us here, I recognize that we have not arrived yet, but we are nearer than we were at the beginning of the Church. The speed with which we arrive at Zion depends on each of us.

I return to our childhood dreams. Do we really want to do something important? Do we really want to do something significant? Do we really want to do something that will make a difference? The chance is ours. And when we are ready, Christ will come.

And so I repeat the scripture I began with. Maybe, like Parley P. Pratt, we could write it on a piece of paper and carry it with us always to remind us of the Lord’s sure promises: “Wherefore, be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great” (D&C 64:33).

May we each commit ourselves to understand the Lord’s purposes for us and to do those small things that will make it possible for him to bring forth that which is great among us. I know that he will do it if we will do it. I pray that we will. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.