

Gratitude—A Commandment of God

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It has been my honor and privilege to greet several thousands of scholars such as you who have come to pursue an education at Brigham Young University. I love the excitement and energy you bring to campus when you are here. So, whether you are a returning BYU student, one who is transferring from another institution, or a new student who is beginning your experience here, welcome to fall semester 2010. I am grateful for the opportunity I have to associate with you during your days on this campus and express this gratitude often to my Heavenly Father.

Maybe some of you can recall your elementary school years and your return from summer vacation. More often than not, it seems, on the first day of school we were given an assignment to write about or draw a picture of something we did that summer. We would then have the opportunity to tell our fellow classmates about our summer vacation. I have not had to complete such an assignment for many years, and I doubt you did either on your first day of classes last week.

For several different reasons, however, this summer has been one in which I have been prompted to reflect often on my gratitude to my Heavenly Father for that which I have been given. If I were to write a paragraph on my

summer experiences, it would express this: It was a summer that included deaths and disappointments as well as joys, successes, and many blessings. I had, as I do each day, many reminders of the love the Lord has for all of us.

In the Doctrine and Covenants we are told: “Ye must give thanks unto God in the Spirit for whatsoever blessing ye are blessed with” (D&C 46:32). In fact, the Lord has said:

And in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments. [D&C 59:21]

Once we realize and understand that we can kindle God’s wrath by neglecting to express to Him constantly our appreciation and thankfulness for His gifts to us, we hopefully will always acknowledge the source of all our blessings. In fact, ingratitude is a distressing sin in the eyes of the Lord.

We all are familiar with the parable of the 10 men who were lepers. Leprosy was a

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loathsome disease in which those suffering from it were isolated and called unclean. Each of us can imagine the horrible lives led by its sufferers. As Jesus entered into a certain village, there were 10 lepers who were not permitted to approach Him, and they stood away from Him. However, their pleading voices must have touched the heart of the Savior. We read:

And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.

And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God,

And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan.

And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?

There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.

And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole. [Luke 17:14–19]

One cannot help but wonder why the other nine did not return to thank their Master. Once cured from this devastating disease, they were clean and acceptable to enter society once again, and they could also be with their loved ones. Their happiness must have been overwhelming, and they must have been filled with amazement.

Then why did they not return to express their thankfulness? Were they so caught up with such joy at their miraculous recovery that they thought only of themselves and not of the Source of their healing? Did they think the priests were the ones who cured them? It is hard to imagine their ingratitude to the Lord. We read that the thankful leper was told that his faith had made him whole. We do not know what happened to the other nine. Could it be possible their future lives were not full and in the days that followed they did not receive

such blessings as did the thankful leper? We do know that their ingratitude was a disappointment to Jesus. I would not want to belong to that party of nine. Would you? I think, however, that sometimes our behavior is similar.

We see in the world of today that many of us take for granted what we have. Our lives are often filled with so many activities—pulling us in different directions from dawn to dusk—that we may forget to “count our many blessings” and to be thankful for each one.

Do we find ourselves expressing our thanks for the obvious blessings in our lives such as family, home, gospel, educational opportunities, and so forth and then neglecting what one might consider “the little blessings”? I asked three of my grandchildren what they were thankful for and received the usual expected responses such as Mom, Dad, cousins, and so forth. Their expressions to me also included their thankfulness for a walk with Charlie, the neighbor’s dog; Toby, a goldfish; and Milo, a friend. Children are excited about life and see and appreciate many things of great value that grown-ups sometimes overlook. We can learn much from youngsters about finding joy and gratitude in life’s small blessings.

How often do we dwell on and worry about the things we don’t have?

The story is told of a person who noticed that his friend was always happy. If there were gray skies, he celebrated the shapes of the clouds; if it stormed, he went out on the front porch to watch and wonder. At each day, he awakened not with anxiety or depression but with rejoicing. Finally, the one friend asked the other, “What is the secret of your happiness? You are not a wealthy man. You are not exempt from the heaviness and pain of this world, yet you are happier than most.”

*And the happy man answered in one word: “Gratitude.” [Given by J. Spencer Kinard, “The Power of Gratitude,” in *A Moment’s Pause: From the Spoken Word* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 109–10]*

This is a lesson for all of us—to be grateful for what we have in life. Gratitude is a virtue as well as a commandment. We should each have a thankful heart and acknowledge our bounteous gifts continuously.

One of my favorite definitions of happiness is not having what you like but liking what you have. Many hours may be wasted in thinking about what one may not have rather than what one does have. Gratitude and happiness seem to be linked together in our lives. Gratitude enables us to have peace and happiness.

There is a book that I have always remembered since I first read it many years ago. I feel it illustrates the scripture found in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, which reads, “In every thing give thanks.” Many of you may be acquainted with Corrie ten Boom’s book entitled *The Hiding Place*. It is the true story of two Dutch women who were imprisoned during World War II for harboring Jewish refugees. Its message bears reminding.

Corrie and Betsie ten Boom lived by the precepts of Christ and found great comfort in reading the Bible. Their prison barracks were dimly lit, dirty, foul smelling, crowded, and constantly patrolled by guards. Corrie was put into a cell with her sister, which was a blessing for them both. Her constant worry was that the guards would see their Bible and take it away, since it was a great source of hope and comfort to them.

The place was so infested with fleas that the sisters could not move without instantly being covered with the bugs. They were very familiar with scriptures concerning gratitude and thankfulness in the Bible. Betsie told Corrie that they should thank God for the fleas. Corrie wasn’t sure she could do this, but she and Betsie bowed their heads and thanked God even for the fleas.

Weeks later Corrie was struck by the blessing that came from her obedience to thank God in all circumstances. Betsie had heard a super-

visor say she wouldn’t step through the door of their cell because of all the fleas, and neither would the guards. It was because of the fleas that they were able to continue to keep their Bible without the guards finding it. They were also able to hold worship meetings and share Christ’s message with other prisoners. God asks us to give thanks even when there may seem to be little for which to be thankful. The ten Boom sisters fully understood this admonition. (See Corrie ten Boom, with John and Elizabeth Sherrill, *The Hiding Place* [New York: Bantam, 1971], 197–99, 208–9.)

When reflecting on what our expressions of gratitude should include, we might refer to section 46 of the Doctrine and Covenants, in which we are told that the Lord gives unto every man a gift by the spirit of God and that it comes for our benefit. Gifts such as listening, seeking that which is righteous, caring for others, and bearing a mighty testimony are mentioned along with others. Each of you has been blessed with such gifts and talents. I see this every day when I am in your midst. You are bright and talented, and your futures are filled with promise as you magnify and acknowledge the individual gifts and talents with which you have been blessed. Since we do not have time to discuss this section fully, I would encourage you to take the opportunity to study it as well as other writings relating to Christ’s ministry in the New World in which you can gain further knowledge and insight.

I would imagine that each of you has at times asked the question “What is my gift or talent?” or maybe thought, “I don’t have any.” The Lord, however, has said that you do. It is your responsibility to recognize, develop, and share your gifts and talents so you can make the world a better place. Each of you has been endowed with different gifts, and what is given to one may not be given to another. Seeking after and developing them is expected of you by Heavenly Father, who gave them to you.

Reliance on the Spirit can help you discover your innate capabilities.

You must also remember not to compete with or imitate others. Avoid comparisons. Value and be grateful for your own uniqueness. Constantly comparing yourself to others and using them to measure your self-worth is destructive. If you find an area in which you may feel you excel, focusing on that is not positive if it causes you to develop a feeling of superiority and smugness. If you find an area in which you feel you fall short, focusing on that is negative and can make you feel hopelessly inferior.

All of you are sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father. He loves you and has given you many blessings to help you build a testimony of Him and His teachings. Find your

gifts and talents, acknowledge them in the spirit of thankfulness, develop them, and use them to serve others as well as His kingdom.

Each of us shows our gratitude by the way we live and our willingness to serve the Lord and keep His commandments. Gratitude is a commandment with a promise, as is taught in Doctrine and Covenants 78:19:

And he who receiveth all things with thankfulness shall be made glorious; and the things of this earth shall be added unto him, even an hundred fold, yea, more.

May we all have a grateful heart, count our many blessings, and use our gifts and talents to serve Him who loves each one of us is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.