

## *“Live in Thanksgiving Daily”*

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I love to be among the youth of the Church. I love your energy, your optimism, your faith. I have heard others say they always feel younger when they spend time with young people. This has always been my experience.

It is good to be here today. I felt a certain thrill as I watched you enter this great Marriott Center. I noticed the beautiful smiling faces, the well-kept hair, the appropriate dress. I thank you for being here today.

Think for a moment, if you will, of someone you know who is truly happy. We’ve all met those who seem to radiate happiness. They seem to smile more than others, they laugh more than others—just being around them makes us happier as well.

Now think of someone you know who isn’t happy at all. Perhaps they seem 10 years older than they are, drained of energy—perhaps they are angry or bitter or depressed.

What is the difference between them? What are the characteristics that differentiate the happy from the miserable? Is there something that unhappy people can do to be happier? I believe there is.

Let me tell you a story to illustrate this observation.

A long time ago in a faraway village lived a man who everyone did their very best to

avoid. He was the type of person who believed that there was only one competent person in the world, and that one person was himself. Consequently he was never satisfied with anything. His shoes never fit right. His shirt never felt comfortable. When his food wasn’t too cold, it was too salty, and when it wasn’t too hot, it was too bland.

If a field wasn’t sowed by himself, it was not sowed well. If he didn’t close the door, the door was not closed properly.

In short, he made a career of frowning, lecturing, criticizing, and mumbling about the incompetencies of every other person in the rest of the world.

Unfortunately, the man was married, which made matters all the worse. No matter what his wife did, in his eyes it was wrong. No matter what the unfortunate woman cooked, sewed, or cleaned, or even when she milked the cow, it was never satisfactory, and he let her know it.

She tried very hard to be a good wife, but it seemed the harder she tried the less she

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pleased him. Finally, one evening she could take no more.

“I’ll tell you what we’ll do,” she told him. “Tomorrow I will do your chores and you will do mine.”

“But you can’t do my chores,” the man replied. “You don’t know the first thing about sowing, hoeing, and irrigating.”

But the woman was adamant. And on top of that, she was filled with a righteous anger that frankly astonished and frightened the man to the point where he didn’t dare disagree.

So the next morning the wife went off to the fields and the man began the domestic chores. After thinking about it, he had actually convinced himself he was looking forward to it. Once and for all, he would demonstrate to his wife how things should be done.

Unfortunately, not everything went according to plan. In fact, nearly everything the man touched turned into disaster. He spilled the milk, let the pig get into the house, lost the cow, burned the dinner, and ultimately set the house on fire, narrowly escaping with his own life.

When his wife returned, she discovered her husband sitting on a pile of ashes, smoke still rising from his clothes. But the woman wasn’t the type to rub things in. She helped him up, wiped the soot from his beard, fixed him a little something to eat, and then prepared a bed of straw for them to sleep on.

From that day forward, the man never complained about anyone or anything else for as long as he lived.

What do you suppose this story teaches us?

For one thing, it teaches that those who complain make their own and others’ lives miserable. The story also teaches humility. It reminds us that “pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18). It teaches us not to judge others until we walk in their shoes for a while.

In addition, the story illustrates a quality that the Roman orator Cicero claimed was

“not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others” (Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Pro Plancio*, 54 B.C.). It is a quality I have found in every happy person I know. It is a quality that instantly makes a person more likable and more at peace. Where there is an abundance, there is happiness. Where there is an absence, there is often sadness, resentment, and futility.

The virtue I am speaking of is gratitude.

In our story, it was the absence of gratitude that made the man miserable. His inability to appreciate others caused him to be critical of their efforts. Not only did he not empathize with them, he could not allow himself to acknowledge their contributions.

The disasters that confronted him surely made him humble, but, more particularly, they made him appreciate and be grateful for his wife.

Gratitude is a mark of a noble soul and a refined character. We like to be around those who are grateful. They tend to brighten all around them. They make others feel better about themselves. They tend to be more humble, more joyful, more likable.

You might be surprised to know that gratitude is a commandment of the Father. “Thou shalt thank the Lord thy God in all things” (D&C 59:7), the Lord has commanded in these latter days. Even further, He has admonished that “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).

In the Book of Mormon we learn that we should “live in thanksgiving daily” (Alma 34:38). Isn’t that a wonderful thought? To live in thanksgiving daily? Can you imagine how your life would improve if you lived in thanksgiving daily? Can you imagine how your life would improve if others did the same? Do you think the world would be a happier place? Less stressful? Less angry? More spiritual?

President Joseph F. Smith proclaimed:

*The grateful man sees so much in the world to be thankful for, and with him the good outweighs the evil. Love overpowers jealousy, and light drives darkness out of his life. Pride destroys our gratitude and sets up selfishness in its place. How much happier we are in the presence of a grateful and loving soul, and how careful we should be to cultivate, through the medium of a prayerful life, a thankful attitude toward God and man! [GD, 263]*

A few minutes ago I asked you to think of someone you knew who was truly happy. Think of the person again, if you will, and grade on this principle: Does he or she live in thanksgiving daily?

Now think of someone you know who is unhappy or resentful. Does this person live in thanksgiving daily?

It is difficult to even imagine a resentful person who is grateful or a grateful person who is resentful. President Gordon B. Hinckley has said:

*Absence of gratitude is the mark of the narrow, uneducated mind. It bespeaks a lack of knowledge and the ignorance of self-sufficiency. It expresses itself in ugly egotism and frequently in wanton mischief. . . .*

*Where there is appreciation, there is courtesy, there is concern for the rights and property of others. Without it, there is arrogance and evil. [CR, October 1964, 117]*

I believe that many people are unhappy because they have not learned to be grateful. Some carry the burden of bitterness and resentment for many years. Some pass their days as though suffering a deep sadness they cannot name. Others are unhappy because life didn't turn out the way they thought it would.

"If only I had money," some might say to themselves, "then I could be happy."

"If only I were better looking."

"If only I were smarter."

"If only I had a new car, a college degree, a job, a wife, hair that wasn't so frizzy." (Or, in my case, if only I had more hair or I was 12 inches taller.)

If we only look around us, there are a thousand reasons for us not to be happy, and it is simplicity itself to blame our unhappiness on the things we lack in life. It doesn't take any talent at all to find them. The problem is, the more we focus on the things we don't have, the unhappier and more resentful we become.

Over the course of my years, I have met thousands of people. I have dined with the prosperous as well as the poverty-stricken. I have conversed with the mighty and with the meek. I have walked with the famous and the feeble. I have run with outstanding athletes and those who are not athletically inclined.

One thing I can tell you with certainty is this: You cannot predict happiness by the amount of money, fame, or power a person has. External conditions do not necessarily make a person happy. The brethren who have had assignments in Africa report that despite the abject poverty, the people are very happy. The fact is that the external things so valued by the world are often the cause of a great deal of misery in the world.

Those who live in thanksgiving daily, however, are usually among the world's happiest people. And they make others happy as well.

Years ago Elder J. Golden Kimball was traveling with one of the presiding brethren in southern Utah. In those days meetings often didn't have a time limit; they went on as long as the speaker wanted to speak. For those of you looking for something to be grateful for, perhaps I've just given you one idea.

One fast Sunday they had been preaching nearly all day. Everyone was hungry, especially Elder Kimball, who felt that he "was pretty nearly dead."

Finally, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, the presiding apostle turned and

said, “Now, Brother Kimball, get up and tell them about the *Era*.”

The *Era* magazine had just been launched, and the Brethren wanted to encourage subscriptions. Elder Kimball approached the pulpit and then, after a short pause, said, “All you men that will take the *Era* if we will let you go home, raise your right hand.” There was not a single man who did not raise his hand that day and subscribe to the *Era*. (In J. Golden Kimball, *CR*, April 1932, 78.)

You see, the power of gratitude is immense.

Rulon Gardner grew up in the small town of Afton, Wyoming. He is one of nine children. His mother and father are faithful members of the Church and instilled proper values in their children.

But because Rulon was so large, his classmates teased him. The taunts and name-calling troubled young Rulon, but he never became angry or resentful. He could have withdrawn and become bitter. Like so many others, he could have counted all the things that were going wrong and simply given up.

Instead, he used the insults as motivation. He determined he would use his size to his advantage. He would make something of himself.

“I would go out, as a kid,” Rulon said, “and I could barely pick up a bale of hay. By the time my senior year came around, I was grabbing four bales of hay at a time, each 100 pounds. Just grabbing them and walking with them and seeing how physically strong I could be” (in Alan Robinson, “Wrestler’s Magic Moment,” Associated Press, Sydney, Australia, 28 September 2000 [at [www.abcnews.go.com/sections/sports/DailyNews/oly\\_gardner\\_000928.html](http://www.abcnews.go.com/sections/sports/DailyNews/oly_gardner_000928.html)]).

He milked cows twice a day, often in sub-zero temperatures. He lifted frozen bales of hay to feed the cows. At times he would carry a newborn calf into the safety of a warm barn. He got up early in the morning, did his chores, then went to school. After school he either

went to wrestling or football practice, then back to the farm to do more chores.

Rulon found that his size wasn’t a disadvantage for him as an athlete—in fact, it was an asset. Wrestling particularly came easy to him, and he became the Wyoming state champion. After graduating from high school he decided that perhaps he might be good enough to compete in the Olympic games.

In Atlanta in 1996, due to a miscommunication, he arrived at the weigh-in 22 seconds too late and missed his chance to compete. Again Rulon could have despaired. He could have cursed his luck. He could have become embittered and resentful.

But do you know what he did? He worked harder. Instead of burying himself in self-pity, he began speaking at youth firesides about his experience. “I missed the Olympic games by 22 seconds,” he told his eager listeners. “Don’t you let anything keep you from your goals.”

After four years of hard work, Rulon Gardner wanted to compete in the 2000 Olympic games in Sydney, Australia. The only trouble was, he couldn’t afford the trip. That’s when the members of his hometown rallied to his side. They held bake sales and potluck dinners and raised enough money to allow Rulon and his family to make the trip to Sydney.

This time he did not miss the weigh-in. He advanced through the preliminary rounds until he reached the final obstacle to his gaining a gold medal.

That obstacle was a man the world called the Siberian Bear, Alexander Karelin. This Russian bear is considered by most as the greatest Greco-Roman wrestler in the history of the sport. Not only had he not lost a single match in 13 years, but no one had scored a point on him in more than a decade. Karelin had won the gold medal in three previous Olympic Games and was the heavy favorite to win an unprecedented fourth gold medal.

But at the end of the gold-medal match, it was the farm boy from Afton, Wyoming, who stood triumphant in what many consider the greatest upset of the summer Olympic games.

“The reason I think I won,” Rulon said, “is because I work harder than anyone else, train harder. And every day I live my life, I do everything I need to do to put my life in order” (in Alan Robinson, Associated Press).

Waving an American flag, a grateful Rulon Gardner thanked his family, his God, and his hometown of Afton, Wyoming, for their helping to make the moment possible.

Winning the gold medal in such a stunning way made Rulon an instant celebrity. Sometimes this sort of attention changes people. Sometimes people become more calloused. Sometimes they forget those they owe the most to. But not Rulon Gardner.

Recently, while a guest on an evening talk show, the host invited Rulon to watch some highlights from his Olympic victory. Without warning, the picture changed to a live shot from Afton, Wyoming. It seemed that the entire population of the town had assembled in the high school gymnasium. They cheered and shouted and held up signs that said, “Rulon’s got milk!” and “My uncle rocks!”

As this man—one of the strongest men in the world—looked into the television monitor at the faces of the people he loved, tears of gratitude came to his eyes.

In a letter written to his stake president, Rulon Gardner said:

*The Lord has given me the chance to work for all my dreams. I feel the Church has helped me to focus and live my life in the ways that have helped me to train and become an Olympic champ. . . . I am blessed . . . to be a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. [Letter to President Val J. Call, Afton Wyoming Stake, 20 October 2000]*

Rulon Gardner knows what it means to be grateful.

Gratitude turns a meal into a feast and drudgery into delight. It softens our grief and heightens our pleasure. It turns the simple and common into the memorable and transcendent. It forges bonds of love and fosters loyalty and admiration.

Living in thanksgiving daily is a habit that will enrich our lives and the lives of those we love. But how do we make this part of who we are? May I suggest three things that will help as we strive to live in thanksgiving daily?

**First, we must open our eyes.**

I agree with Robert Louis Stevenson, who wrote, “The man who forgets to be thankful has fallen asleep in life” (*Quotationary*, electronic quotation dictionary). Unfortunately, because the beauties of life are so abundant, sometimes we take them for granted.

Our minds have a marvelous capacity to notice the unusual. However, the opposite is true as well: The more often we see the things around us—even the beautiful and wonderful things—the more they become invisible to us.

That is why we often take for granted the beauty of this world: the flowers, the trees, the birds, the clouds—even those we love.

Because we see things so often, we see them less and less.

Those who live in thanksgiving daily, however, have a way of opening their eyes and seeing the wonders and beauties of this world as though seeing them for the first time.

I encourage you to look around you. Notice the people you care about. Notice the beauties of this campus. Notice the fragrance of the flowers and the song of the birds. Notice and give thanks for the blue of the sky, the red of the leaves, and the white of the clouds. Enjoy every sight, every smell, every taste, every sound.

When we open our eyes and give thanks for the bountiful beauty of this life, we live in thanksgiving daily.

**The second thing we can do is open our hearts.**

We must let go of the negative emotions that bind our hearts and instead fill our souls with love, faith, and thanksgiving.

Anger, resentment, and bitterness stunt our spiritual growth. Would you bathe in impure water? Then why do we bathe our spirits with negative and bitter thoughts and feelings?

You can cleanse your heart. You don't have to harbor thoughts and feelings that drag you down and destroy your spirit.

You can repent of uncleanness. That is the miracle of Christ's atoning sacrifice. You can become clean. You can cleanse your heart of impurity.

Begin the process today. Repent of those things you should repent of. Drink deeply of the living waters of the gospel. These latter days are a time of great spiritual thirst. Many in the world are searching, often intensely, for a source of refreshment that will quench their yearning for meaning and direction in their lives. The Lord provides the living water that can quench the burning thirst of those whose lives are parched by a drought of truth.

Pray with all your heart. Consider the love your Heavenly Father has for all His children. Open your hearts to His cleansing word. Feast on the words of holy writ. Cherish the messages of modern-day prophets and apostles. Forgive others who have offended you. Don't waste another moment feeling self-pity. Every day drain from your heart the feelings of resentment, rage, and defeat that do nothing but discourage and destroy. Fill your heart with those things that ennoble, encourage, and inspire.

The great Book of Mormon prophet Nephi certainly had reason to be resentful. Hated by his brothers, bound and beaten and nearly murdered, he had plenty to be bitter about. After his father died, Nephi must have felt completely alone. He surely felt threatened. He surely felt discouraged. He surely felt troubled. But when it came time for him to communicate his feelings, what did he write?

*Behold, my soul delighteth in the things of the Lord; and my heart pondereth continually upon the things which I have seen and heard. [2 Nephi 4:16]*

Yes, his path had been difficult. Yes, his heart groaned because of mistakes he had made, but he did not allow himself to linger in negativity. Instead, he told himself:

*Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul.*

*Do not anger again because of mine enemies. Do not slacken my strength because of mine afflictions.*

*Rejoice, O my heart, and cry unto the Lord, and say: O Lord, I will praise thee forever; yea, my soul will rejoice in thee. [2 Nephi 4:28–30]*

### **The third thing we can do to live in thanksgiving daily is open our arms.**

One of the best ways we show our gratitude is by blessing the lives of those around us. The great King Benjamin taught his people:

*If you should render all the thanks and praise which your whole soul has power to possess, to that God who has created you, and has kept and preserved you, and has caused that ye should rejoice . . . —*

*. . . If ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants. [Mosiah 2:20–21]*

And how do we render thanks unto God? King Benjamin told us that as well:

*And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God. [Mosiah 2:17]*

We can live in thanksgiving daily by opening our arms to those around us. When was the last time you told someone you love how much they mean to you? When was the last time you expressed your gratitude to someone who has always been there for you, someone who

has sacrificed for you, someone whose heart has always been filled with hopes and dreams for you?

When was the last time you unselfishly reached out to help another in need? Every time we cheer another's heart, every time we ease another's burden, every time we lift a weary hand, we show our gratitude to that God to whom we owe all that we have and all that we are.

Not long ago a mother and father from the Republic of Georgia faced a terrifying reality. The doctors told them their baby had a heart condition, and unless he had surgery he would die. Because they did not have adequate facilities in Georgia, the mother and father walked across their country and all the way to Yerevan, Armenia, seeking medical help.

The Armenian doctors examined the child and agreed that the baby needed heart surgery. They knew how to perform the surgery and they had the necessary facilities, but they couldn't perform the operation because they didn't have the right tubing. As much as they wanted to help, there was nothing they could do. They told the couple to take their baby home to die.

As you know, the Church—through its Humanitarian Service arm—sends millions of pounds of food, clothing, and medical and educational materials throughout the world each year. As it so happened, Elder and Sister Sangster were serving a humanitarian mission in Armenia, and they had just received a container of medical supplies.

You may have already guessed that tucked away in this container of medical supplies was a box of precisely the kind of tubing needed for this child's operation.

When the doctors discovered the tubing, they rushed the baby into surgery and performed the operation.

That's a wonderful story and one that repeats itself daily as a result of the tremendous humanitarian help that is given to many

nations in the world. The great welfare effort given by the Church benefits members and nonmembers during times of need. It reaches out to care for others. But what happened later makes it an even better story. One day, soon after the operation, Elder and Sister Sangster heard a knock at their door. When they opened it, this loving mother and father fell to their knees and wept as they thanked the Sangsters and their church for supplying the precious tubing that had saved the life of their child.

The blessings that come from opening our arms to others are among the choicest this earth has to offer.

As we strive to open our eyes, hearts, and arms, our step will become a little lighter, our smile will become a little brighter, and the darkness that sometimes broods over our lives will become a little whiter. Don't be discouraged if you haven't been an especially grateful person. Rejoice and think of what an impression you will make on those who thought they knew you. Think of how delightfully surprised they will be.

Be grateful. Every day is a new canvas—a new opportunity. Our beloved President Gordon B. Hinckley has said:

*My plea is that we stop seeking out the storms and enjoy more fully the sunlight. I am suggesting that as we go through life, we "accentuate the positive." I am asking that we look a little deeper for the good, that we still our voices of insult and sarcasm, that we more generously compliment and endorse virtue and effort. [Standing for Something (New York: Times Books, 2000), 101]*

Choice blessings await those who live in thanksgiving daily. "He who receiveth all things with thankfulness," the Lord has promised, "shall be made glorious; and the things of this earth shall be added unto him, even an hundred fold, yea, more" (D&C 78:19).

Don't wait to start. Open your eyes, open your hearts, and open your arms. I promise

that as you do so, you will feel greater joy and happiness. Your life will have a new level of meaning. You will forge relationships that will transcend this life and endure through the eternities.

My dear brothers and sisters, I am grateful to be here with you. I am grateful for this experience of mortality. I am grateful for the gospel and for the life and testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith. I am grateful for my wonderful wife, my dear children and grandchildren. I am grateful for the support and love shown to me by countless friends and members of the Church throughout the world. I am grateful for life and even more grateful for the glorious promise of eternal life to come.

Not everyone can be a star quarterback; not everyone can be the CEO of a Fortune 500 company; not everyone can win a gold medal at the Olympics; but everyone—*everyone*—can live in thanksgiving daily.

As a special witness, I bear solemn testimony that Jesus is the living Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. He asks that we believe in Him, that we learn of Him, that we strive to follow His teachings, and that we adhere to the teachings of our prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley. He inspires him in the direction needed for this life and life eternal.

May we follow Him in all we do is my humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.