

# The Covenant Path

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I am honored by the opportunity to speak to you today. I love to come to the BYU campus. I stand before you as “true blue.” As it has already been said, my shade of blue was painted in Cache Valley at Utah State University. My husband’s blue has a reddish tint and our children’s blues are of various hues. Yet when we see the color blue—any blue—we cheer.

There is something very stimulating about a university campus. Where there is a learning atmosphere there is energy, and increasing your knowledge is progressive. You are advancing on the path of life.

Now you may be puzzled at today’s devotional and may be asking, “What does the Primary general president have to say to me?” After all, many of you graduated from Primary years ago and have “put away [those] childish things.”<sup>1</sup> Yet the messages and principles of the songs you sang in Primary still apply today and hopefully have remained in your heart.

Today we sang “I Will Follow God’s Plan.” We sang the words “My life is a gift; my life has a plan. My life has a purpose; in heav’n it began.”<sup>2</sup>

As a student on this campus you are progressing with your plan. You have a purpose in mind. Can you see the Lord’s hand in your life? Can you see the path you took to get here?

I was born in Ogden, Utah, and grew up in Salt Lake City. At age eighteen, when I was about to leave to go to Utah State, my goals were simple. I really had just two. I’m going to be honest with you and tell you what they were: (1) I wanted to be an elementary school teacher, and (2) I wanted to fall in love. Now that seems simple, but I really did not think beyond those two goals. I hoped that somewhere out there was a handsome young man who also had the goal to stay on the path, get an education, and fall in love so we could marry, have a family, and bring children into this world. But I was anxious and nervous inside. What if my plan did not unfold *how* I wanted it to and *when* I wanted it to?

I was looking at the path through a magnifying glass, and all I could see were my shoelaces. I remembered those lessons in Primary about the plan of salvation. I could see the circles and the arrows on the chart, but I could not yet visualize myself in the plan. I wish I would have had the words to the chorus of this Primary song then. They read:

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*I will follow God's plan for me,  
Holding fast to his word and his love.  
I will work, and I will pray;  
I will always walk in his way.  
Then I will be happy on earth  
And in my home above.*<sup>3</sup>

That is the key, and it is really quite simple: "I will follow *God's plan* for me." And we do it by holding fast to His word, with His love, and through our prayers to Him while simply living life.

Brigham Young said, "Live so that the spirit of our religion [lives] within us."<sup>4</sup> We are a making-and-keeping-covenants people, and nothing better shapes us than the sacred covenants we make to the Lord. We live these covenants when we follow His plan, and we come to know who we really are.

George Bernard Shaw said: "Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself."<sup>5</sup>

That is true. I think of it this way: There are those who see themselves on this earth as simply growing up—helpless in a way. They eat, they sleep, and they live their lives. They watch themselves get taller and older. They let the world mold them and allow their circumstances to dictate their future. It is as if they are watching the wind swirl around a block of sandstone. The years go by until, finally, one day a shape is created. Or we can decide the kind of person we want to become, grip the chisel, and go to work. The sculpture being created is now of our creation. At times we may even stand back in awe at the form it is taking. The pinnacle of our reality is when we come to know we are not alone in our work. The real Artist is standing at our side, and His vision for this exquisite piece is beyond our comprehension.

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin said:

*We see ourselves in terms of yesterday and today.  
Our Heavenly Father sees us in terms of forever.*

*Although we might settle for less, Heavenly Father won't, for He sees us as the glorious beings we are capable of becoming.*<sup>6</sup>

It is as if the Lord has given us tools with which to create this "being." These tools are the covenants we make and keep, beginning with the baptismal covenant.

A covenant is personal. It is so personal that it is given to us individually, and often our very own name is said in conjunction with the ordinance that accompanies the covenant. By living our covenants with the Lord's help, He sculpts us into a masterpiece.

Think of the baptismal covenant. Lately I have viewed the covenant of baptism through a granddaughter's eyes. Lucy Catherine is three years old. In her world she is a princess. She is beginning this earthly path. I think she takes after her grandmother. Lucy is my buddy. She loves to climb up into my lap, and together we watch the Bible videos on my iPad. She can operate the iPad all by herself. Her favorite Bible video is of Jesus being baptized in the River Jordan.

Lucy is only three years old, but she feels something when she watches Jesus being baptized, and so do I.

Elder Robert D. Hales said: "Many members of the Church do not fully understand what happened when they went into the waters of baptism." He then asked:

*Do [we] understand . . . that when [we were] baptized [we were] changed forever? . . .*

*. . . Our baptism and confirmation is the gateway into His kingdom. When we enter, we covenant to be of His kingdom—forever!*<sup>7</sup>

We see powerful evidences of the magnitude of the baptismal covenant in the history of the Church. In Liverpool, England, in the 1840s, George Cannon and his wife, Ann Quayle Cannon, were converted to the gospel. George wrote in a letter to his sister:

*I was sincerely desirous to lead a new life . . . ; and though slow of belief at first, and not seeing the necessity of baptism, yet God in His infinite mercy opened my eyes.*<sup>8</sup>

With the covenant of baptism and the promise of more covenants came the desire to join the Saints in America at all costs. Ann tucked a little money away each month so the family would have the funds necessary for the voyage.

*The wish to get to Zion became . . . a consuming desire. . . . She began to count the days that must elapse before the ship's sailing. She was impressed that if this season . . . should pass and find the family still in England, she would not be alive to urge the journey another year. . . . She had a sure premonition that she should not live to reach the shores of America, and told her husband so.*<sup>9</sup>

Ann was expecting their seventh child at the time, and George tried to persuade her to wait.

[But] she refused absolutely—she would rather die in trying to go than live [by] remaining. . . .

. . . Both [George and Ann] prayed . . . that God's blessing would attend them in doing what they believed to be His will.<sup>10</sup>

On September 17, 1842, George, Ann, and their six children boarded the ship and set sail for America. George later wrote:

*We are now launched on the bosom of the mighty deep, and sea-sickness has made the passengers for the most part very ill. My dear Ann is dreadfully affected with this nauseous sickness. . . . Yet I have never heard one complaint from her on her own account. [She] regret[s] . . . not being able to assist me in the care of the children.*<sup>11</sup>

The days and weeks went by, and Ann only worsened. On October 28 she passed away. George wrote, "O God, how mysterious are Thy ways! Teach me resignation to Thy will!"<sup>12</sup>

Both George and Ann Quayle Cannon understood the promise "The Lord God will proceed to make bare his arm . . . in bringing about his covenants and his gospel unto those who are of the house of Israel."<sup>13</sup> George and Ann Cannon lived their lives keeping their covenant of baptism and looking to the promise of more covenants while carving out a future for their posterity.

What did they clearly understand about the covenant of baptism? What was it that drove George and Ann to come to America at all costs? They were simply doing what they believed to be the Lord's will.

Today we are not asked to move to Salt Lake City after our baptism. But we do enter into sacred covenants with God, and we promise to do three things:

- Take upon ourselves the name of Jesus Christ
- Keep His commandments
- Always remember Him

**How can we take upon ourselves the name of Christ today?** We do more than represent Him and follow Him: "We . . . see ourselves as His. We . . . put Him [and His work] first in our lives. We [seek] what He wants rather than what we want or what the world teaches us to want."<sup>14</sup>

How can we live that baptismal promise in our daily lives here as students at BYU? It is a process, and oftentimes we wrestle to align our lives with the Father's will. At times we may even question our judgment. We may rationalize our actions and say, "But others are doing it." The choices we make follow us into our classrooms, in our conversations, with our callings, and on our dates. The results may alter how we dress, our appearance, what we text, the movies we see, and our very thoughts. When we seek His will, He will magnify our every effort to stay on the path back to Him. We need not ever feel

alone. Be patient with yourself as you learn this process.

Our prayers may become different, and we may find ourselves asking, “What would Thou have me do?” and “Help me know what is Thy will.” We find ourselves stepping out of the boat, so to speak, to do His will. We prepare spiritually each day with personal prayers to Him, we read His words in the scriptures, and then we trust that He will guide us. His will then becomes ours.

Elder David A. Bednar said:

*You exercised your moral agency to accept the conditions of the baptismal covenant. . . . And as a representative of Jesus Christ, your life is no longer just about what you want but what God wants for you.*<sup>15</sup>

Missionaries all over the world literally take upon themselves the name of Christ when they put on that missionary badge. We witnessed prophetic revelation last October 6 when President Thomas S. Monson announced the missionary age changes.<sup>16</sup> The response has been astounding. We are witnessing a modern-day miracle in these latter days.

Many of you have experienced a mission, and you know what it is like. It is not easy. When I served my first mission with my husband, in my first sentence in my first letter home to both our children and my parents, who had also served, I asked, “Why didn’t you tell me a mission was this hard?” When it becomes impossible to carry on, it is that covenant to do the Lord’s will that causes a missionary to find a private place and get on his or her knees. His or her prayer may be “I cannot do this alone. Only with Thee can I continue; only with Thee can I learn another language; and only with Thee can I teach those older, wiser, and more articulate than I.” A mission changes our life for the better because we take upon us His name.

**When we are baptized we covenant to keep His commandments.** This commitment to come into God’s kingdom separates—but, as Elder Robert D. Hales notes, does not isolate<sup>17</sup>—us from the world as we “stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places.”<sup>18</sup> To stand as a witness includes everything we do and say.

In living the baptismal covenant we look for ways to keep the commandments rather than look for ways around them.

While I was visiting Buenos Aires, Argentina, I met Marianela, a frail, beautiful mother with two children, ages nine and twelve. All three had been baptized. Marianela was dealing with severe rheumatoid arthritis. She could only stand or lie down; she could not sit. At home she taught her children with what resources she had. She used both the scriptures and the Relief Society manual. I noticed those two books stacked neatly on her table. She wanted her children to keep the commandments and participate on Sunday and partake of the sacrament, so she accepted the invitation from the bishop’s wife to pick them up weekly. Marianela would ride to church lying down in the backseat of the car. It was her way of practicing obedience and aligning her heart with His. In Primary we sing the words “Keep the commandments! In this there is safety; in this there is peace.”<sup>19</sup> There was peace in Marianela’s home.

I saw another example of keeping the commandments in the Ilagan Stake in the Philippines. Just before a meeting I watched a large truck pull up to the chapel entrance. I could see the arms of the members reaching through the slats on the side of the truck to wave to others in the parking lot. The truck was covered with a canvas top. Out jumped numerous happy Filipinos—the men in their white shirts and ties and the women in their dresses. I learned they had ridden for hours to get there, bouncing on the wooden benches inside the

truck. We all hurried into the building and sat down. I thought of their sacrifice to be there—and then the tears streamed down my face as they sang the opening song. With smiles they sang “Because I Have Been Given Much.”<sup>20</sup>

Part of keeping the commandments is serving the Lord. President Lugo, the president of the Ilagan Stake, is a tiny little man with great faith. He has the image of the Savior in his countenance. I learned that he had been in a serious cycle accident and had been in the hospital. It was nearing the time in their stake for their yearly trip to the temple to do baptisms for the dead. He was devastated at the thought of not going with the youth, but he could not walk.

His wife said, “You cannot go. If you go, the youth would have to carry you, and that would be asking too much.”

President Lugo said, “If they will carry me into the temple, I will walk out.”

And that is exactly what he did. How can we possibly draw limits on our service to the Lord?

**As we keep our covenant to always remember the Lord, He will help us follow His plan.** Let’s be honest: While trying to live our covenants, we sometimes get discouraged. We may see nothing but our imperfections. We may think our mistakes are impossible to repair, and we may think we cannot change. We may feel like we are failing.

As we chisel in the sandstone to create this new self, we sometimes chip off huge chunks of stone. Doing this may appear to disfigure our ultimate goal. Like Nephi, we may say, “O wretched man [or woman] that I am!”<sup>21</sup> We may lose hope, and we may fear that there is no way to repair our mistakes. But the real Artist, Jesus Christ, patiently and lovingly stands by our side and waits for us to ask for His help. He is ready to heal us. Then, like Nephi, with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, we may ask:

*Wilt thou redeem my soul? . . .*

*. . . Wilt thou encircle me . . . in the robe of thy righteousness! . . . Wilt thou make my path straight before me! . . .*

*O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever.*<sup>22</sup>

One real blessing is that this Sunday we will again have the opportunity to renew the covenant we made at baptism as we partake of the sacrament with the glorious promise that we may always have His Spirit to be with us.

No wonder that when Romans 6 refers to baptism the scripture reads, “Walk in newness of life.”<sup>23</sup> That newness of life is the Atonement working within us, and we can experience it weekly. The Artist, Jesus Christ, is our Savior and Redeemer. “He was foreordained to carry out the Atonement—to come to the earth, suffer the penalty for our sins, die on the cross, and be resurrected.”<sup>24</sup> He will not halt the sculpturing process or put down the chisel until we are perfect and living in His presence. The Atonement is the supreme expression of the Savior’s love for the Father and for us.<sup>25</sup>

The sculptor Michelangelo, “when asked how he had produced the magnificent statue of an angel, . . . is reported to have simply replied, ‘I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free.’”<sup>26</sup>

And so it is with the mutual efforts of a loving Savior and a covenant-keeping disciple on the path. The angel is within each one of us. Let us live the covenant we have made at baptism and seek to do His will. We will watch the plan He has masterfully created for each one of us take shape. Regardless of its form, we will stand in awe as the angel emerges, and we will give credit to our Savior Jesus Christ, for He is the perfect Artist.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## Notes

1. 1 Corinthians 13:11.
2. “I Will Follow God’s Plan,” *Songbook*, 164.

3. *Songbook*, 165; emphasis added.
4. *DBY*, 204.
5. George Bernard Shaw, quoted in Joseph B. Wirthlin, “Lessons Learned in the Journey of Life,” *Ensign*, December 2000, 12.
6. Joseph B. Wirthlin, “The Great Commandment,” *Ensign*, November 2007, 29–30.
7. Robert D. Hales, “The Covenant of Baptism: To Be in the Kingdom and of the Kingdom,” *Ensign*, November 2000, 8, 9; emphasis in original.
8. Beatrice Cannon Evans and Janath Russell Cannon, eds., *Cannon Family Historical Treasury* (Salt Lake City: George Cannon Family Association, 1967), 36.
9. Evans and Cannon, *Cannon Family*, 44–45.
10. Evans and Cannon, *Cannon Family*, 45.
11. Evans and Cannon, *Cannon Family*, 47.
12. Evans and Cannon, *Cannon Family*, 50.
13. 1 Nephi 22:11.
14. Henry B. Eyring, “That We May Be One,” *Ensign*, May 1998, 67.
15. David A. Bednar, in Heather Whittle Wrigley, “Elder Bednar Instructs Members in Caribbean Area,” Church News and Events, 24 February 2012; [www.lds.org/church/news/elder-bednar-instructs-members-in-caribbean-area](http://www.lds.org/church/news/elder-bednar-instructs-members-in-caribbean-area).
16. See Thomas S. Monson, “Welcome to Conference,” *Ensign*, November 2012, 4–5.
17. See Hales, “The Covenant of Baptism,” 8.
18. Mosiah 18:9.
19. “Keep the Commandments,” *Songbook*, 146.
20. *Hymns*, 2002, no. 219.
21. 2 Nephi 4:17.
22. 2 Nephi 4:31, 33–34.
23. Romans 6:4.
24. *True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 15.
25. See *True to the Faith*, 15.
26. David S. Baxter, “Overcoming Feelings of Inadequacy,” *Ensign*, August 2007, 14.