

Always

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I am grateful to be with you. Those who speak to you sometimes ask for your prayers to sustain them in their efforts. I ask that of you tonight with a special urgency and for a specific purpose.

Years ago I served as the bishop of a ward composed of young people. Time has wiped away much of what I learned then of their sorrows and mistakes, but I can still see in my mind most of their faces. I meet some of them as I travel about the world. Their faces and their physiques have been changed enough by time that I sometimes stumble trying to remember names. Others I have followed more closely, with a chance to know what life has offered them. When I learn of their lives, I am amazed at the variety of their experiences. Each life seems to be unique. About all they have in common, as nearly as I can tell, is that they have been surprised by the pattern of the tests of their faith. The surprise has come because they could not know when the tests would come, what they would be, nor how long they would last.

For a few, the tests are over. For some of the members of that ward, the tests ended early. I was reminded of one young man the other day. For me his face will always be young and bright with hope. He left our ward for a mission in Japan. Decades later I mentioned his

name in a talk I gave to a group of Latter-day Saints in Tokyo. After the meeting a number of members came to me, their faces shining with the brightness that I remember in his face when he returned from his mission. They told that he was “their” missionary. If I understood their English, they said that he was the greatest missionary they had ever known.

I was released as the bishop when our family was asked to move to another state. I kept track of that missionary enough to know that he had graduated from college, applied to medical school, and been accepted. I did not know his plans for the summer before he began medical school, but I am sure that he looked forward with great anticipation to the years ahead.

A phone rang where we then lived, and I learned that he had been killed. He and friends had gone to climb a peak in the Wind River Range in the western United States. I was invited to speak at his funeral. I asked some of the young men who had been climbing with

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him, friends from our old ward family, to meet me at the chapel where the service would begin in a few minutes. We went to a room to be alone. After we had renewed our acquaintance, I asked if they would tell me something about our friend's life. I think they knew why.

I wished to speak in the funeral about him and his life. They knew how much I had admired him. They also knew that I had not seen him nor spoken with him for a few years. They knew that I wanted to praise him but that the praise had to be true.

They told me this story: They had camped the night in preparation for the ascent to the peak. As they climbed, high on the face of the mountain, a storm came upon them. They could not see their way because of the clouds and the storm. Our friend had volunteered to go alone to find the path. He didn't come back. They found later that he had fallen to his death, trying to save his friends.

Then, without my prompting with a question, they told me of more than his courage. They told me of where he had been on the trail of faith. They said that the night before the climb, while others had talked quietly and prepared for sleep, he had been studying his scriptures and his missionary lessons, in Japanese.

I suppose that in the time after his mission he had the trials and the temptations that are common to returning missionaries. The fact that he had applied to medical school makes it clear to me that he thought the tests of life stretched far ahead of him. Yet when life ended, he was ready. I think of him often. A stake president, who was his friend in youth, met me the other day in Virginia. I heard the same sound of love and awe in his voice that I heard from the members in Tokyo and from the fellow mountain climbers.

When such a life touches ours, we are never the same again. We want somehow to be as constant in our faith as he was. We want to know the way to endure whatever surprises life may give us, always ready with the power to pass the

tests that come, always faithful, whatever the tests—to the end, whenever that may come.

The Savior has used the word *always* in two settings that must have caused you to wonder. The first setting is in every sacrament meeting. The word *always* is used in a covenant, a sacred promise with God, that you are making. This is what you hear, read by authorized servants of God: "That they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and *always* remember him and keep his commandments which he has given them; that they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen" (D&C 20:77; emphasis added).

Another setting in which the word *always* is used is in a commandment. The Lord repeats the command often with only slight variations. Here is one of them: "Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, ye must watch and pray *always* lest ye enter into temptation; for Satan desireth to have you, that he may sift you as wheat" (3 Nephi 18:18; emphasis added).

You promise *always* to remember Him. And He warns you to pray *always*. You may have wondered, as have I, why He used the word *always*, given the nature of mortality as it weighs upon us. Just think of what will press upon you when this meeting is over and, to be realistic, may be pressing into the minds of some of you at this moment. You will have to get somewhere, you will likely have to do something, or at least you promised to do something, before the night is over. You may even be thinking about some people you will be with or that you might like to be with, if you could just arrange it. Thoughts like that, and many others, may be shuttling through your mind now and will as soon as you leave. You know from experience how hard it is to think of anything consciously all the time.

I asked you to pray for me as we began. Some of you took a few seconds, or even longer, to utter a silent prayer for me and for our time together, that we might have the Spirit and that we might be taught. And yet for

your prayer to be answered it will be necessary for you to turn your attention to listening. Even in this meeting, or in any service to God, you will not be consciously praying—always. So, what does the Master mean when He warns us to “pray always”?

I am not wise enough to know all of His purposes in giving us a covenant to always remember Him and in His warning us to pray always lest we be overcome. But I know one. It is because He knows perfectly the powerful forces that influence us and also what it means to be human.

You and I can see evidence of the acceleration in the two great opposing forces around us. One is the force of righteousness. For instance, temples of God are being built at a rate across the earth that just a few years ago would have been unthinkable. Missionaries are being called in numbers and to new places which change so rapidly that I have learned not to try to give the numbers or the places because my knowledge of the changing facts will have fallen behind the reality. Leaders of nations and opinion makers in the media seem to see that which was prophesied in the infant days of the Church by the Lord, in these words given to the Prophet Joseph Smith:

And also those to whom these commandments were given, might have power to lay the foundation of this church, and to bring it forth out of obscurity and out of darkness, the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth, with which I, the Lord, am well pleased, speaking unto the church collectively and not individually. [D&C 1:30]

Even the world can see the emergence of a power beyond what might have been reasonably predicted. Yet few seem to recognize that the power stems not from organization or programs or wealth. Rather, it comes from individual hearts changed by the faith to keep the commandments of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Opposing Forces

As has always been true, there is an opposing power. It is the power of sin, and it is visibly accelerating. I will not try to bring examples to your minds. The media and what you see in the lives of those around you present you with tragedy enough. And even in your experience, you surely must sense the ominous increase of toleration and even encouragement of the powers of sin to corrupt and torment. More and more we see the reality of this description:

Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself. [2 Nephi 2:27]

The Master not only foresees perfectly the growing power of those opposing forces but what it is like to be mortal. He knows what it is like to have the cares of life press in upon us. He knows that we are to eat bread by the sweat of our brows and what cares, concerns, and even sorrows come from the command to bring children into the earth. And He knows that both the trials we face and our human powers to deal with them ebb and flow. He knows what it is for a missionary to arrive in a strange country, perhaps try to speak a new language, eat unfamiliar food, work until fatigue almost overwhelms, be rejected often, savor the moments when the miracle of the gospel changing lives occurs, and then return home to face another set of challenges and changes. And He knows how our human powers to cope are not constant.

He knows the mistake we can so easily make. It is to underestimate the forces working on us and to rely too much on our human powers. And so He offers us the covenant to always

remember Him and the warning to pray always so that we will place our reliance on Him, our only safety. It is not hard to know what to do. The very difficulty of remembering *always* and praying *always* is a needed spur to *try harder*. The danger lies in delay or drift.

Years ago, one of the things we taught the people we met as missionaries was that they must either progress or they would fall back spiritually. We told them it was dangerous to think that they could stand still. I remember feeling that it was true, and yet I wondered why it was so. Time has taught me. As the forces around us increase in intensity, whatever spiritual strength was once sufficient will not be enough. And whatever growth in spiritual strength we once thought was possible, greater growth will be made available to us. Both the need for spiritual strength and the opportunity to acquire it will increase at rates which we underestimate at our peril.

Time has also taught me something about the ebb and flow of our own powers and of how we may not notice that change. At Christmastime one of our married sons stayed with his wife and baby in our basement guest room. He found there a daily journal I had kept as a young father, not much older than many of you. I had forgotten it was there and what it contained. At dinner my son began to recount what he had read there of my experiences with him and his brothers and of my straining to live a little better, to have the Atonement work more fully in my life, and to become what I needed to be. He had read of my working intensely and praying earnestly into the early hours of the morning. As he spoke, I thought of some of you.

You may come upon your missionary journals put away in a closet in your home. You may read and feel a shock as you remember how hard you worked, how constantly you thought of the Savior and His sacrifice for you and for those you tried to meet and teach, and how fervently and often you prayed. The shock

will come from realizing how much the cares of life have taken you from where you once were, so close to always remembering and always praying.

Move Forward Spiritually

My message is a plea, a warning, and a promise.

I plead with you to do the simple things with determination that will move you forward spiritually.

Start with remembering Him. You will remember what you know and what you love. The Savior gave us the scriptures, paid by prophets at a price we cannot measure, so that we could know Him. Lose yourself in them. Decide now to read more and more effectively than you have ever done before.

Just last month I learned again the power that comes from trying harder to have the scriptures opened to our hearts. It began when I noticed the scriptures of a man sitting next to me in a meeting. He opened them as the discussion progressed, and I could see that they were marked, as I had done, but with a difference. He had placed colored tags on the edges of pages, keyed to the colors in which he had marked the scriptures. I asked him after the meeting to tell me about it. He showed me the front of his scriptures where he had placed a typed page. On that page were topics about the gospel, each with a line under it. And he had placed the colored markers on the edge of the scriptures, one color for each topic, so that he could study all the scriptures that were helpful to him on that topic.

Within a day I had purchased an inexpensive set of scriptures. But it took more than a few days and more than a few prayers for me to know the topics that would open the scriptures anew for me. I chose the topics that would teach me of my call to be a witness of Jesus Christ. The first topic is the witness that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; the next is that He is risen; and the third is that He is the head

of His Church. I would not urge you to buy a new set of scriptures, nor to get colored tags and colored pencils, nor to choose the topics that I chose. But I plead with you to return to the scriptures in some way that opens your mind and heart to be taught.

Many of the scriptures have become familiar to us. Yet in just a few weeks what I remember now about the Savior, and what I feel about Him, have been enriched.

I began to read with purpose. Perhaps it was because of the Christmas season. Perhaps it was because I wanted always to remember Him. But I found myself drawn to the accounts of His birth. I read again His words, spoken to a prophet named Nephi, recorded in the Book of Mormon, familiar to us all. And yet it seemed new to me:

Behold, I come unto my own, to fulfil all things which I have made known unto the children of men from the foundation of the world, and to do the will, both of the Father and of the Son — of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh. And behold, the time is at hand, and this night shall the sign be given.

And it came to pass that the words which came unto Nephi were fulfilled, according as they had been spoken; for behold, at the going down of the sun there was no darkness; and the people began to be astonished because there was no darkness when the night came. [3 Nephi 1:14–15]

And then, because my mind was set to try to know more of Him, I noticed in my reading another scripture that had somehow never before caught my eye. It is in Zechariah, not a frequent stopping place unless you are on a search. Zechariah prophesied of the Second Coming of the Savior with these words: “But it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light” (Zechariah 14:7).

In our little family Christmas pageant one of the children has usually played the part of Samuel, the Lamanite prophet, foretelling the sign of the Savior’s birth. This year was our most successful pageant, at least for Samuel, because at last we succeeded in persuading the people playing the part of the mob not to hit him with the tinfoil stones they threw at him. So this year we were scripturally accurate.

But something else was new for me this year. As I had never done before, I felt that I saw in my mind and felt in my heart the fulfillment of Samuel’s prophecy that the sun would set without darkness. I saw it at His birth, as if I were somewhere among the people in these lands of promise. And I saw it as it will be when He comes to stand, in resurrected glory, on the Mount of Olives. The darkness is dispelled when the promised Messiah comes with healing in His wings. Knowing how much I need that healing, my heart nearly bursts with joy and love for Him at the thought of that light. I believe I will never see white lights at Christmas again or the dawning of a new day, as the sun banishes darkness, without the sight triggering love in my heart for Him.

I have learned from that journey again through the scriptures and my increase in love for Him something about always remembering. Fathers and mothers who love their children already know it. It is this: The child may be absent. The cares of the day may be great. Yet love for the child can be ever present in the heart of the parent, coloring and shaping every word, every act, and every choice. I don’t know all that is meant by this passage of scripture, but at least part of it is about the possibility of a change in our hearts, that our love of the Savior might always be there and growing:

But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him.

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be

filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen. [Moroni 7:47–48]

Always

Now I also plead with you to be determined to pray with all the energy of your heart, that you might have every gift that a loving Heavenly Father knows you must have to serve His Son and to endure against the powers of darkness.

Just as you can have love in your heart always, your heart can be drawn out in prayer—always.

You remember that you were promised that very power, which can become greater in times of greater need. This is the Master’s command through a prophet:

Yea, humble yourselves, and continue in prayer unto him.

Cry unto him when ye are in your fields, yea, over all your flocks.

Cry unto him in your houses, yea, over all your household, both morning, mid-day, and evening.

Yea, cry unto him against the power of your enemies.

Yea, cry unto him against the devil, who is an enemy to all righteousness.

Cry unto him over the crops of your fields, that ye may prosper in them.

Cry over the flocks of your fields, that they may increase.

But this is not all; ye must pour out your souls in your closets, and your secret places, and in your wilderness.

Yea, and when you do not cry unto the Lord, let your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you. [Alma 34:19–27; emphasis added]

The Lord has given us touching evidence of the power of such prayers of the heart. You have read in the Book of Mormon of the people of Alma the Elder who would have been destroyed had they prayed openly:

And Alma and his people did not raise their voices to the Lord their God, but did pour out their hearts to him; and he did know the thoughts of their hearts.

And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came to them in their afflictions, saying: Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me; and I will covenant with my people and deliver them out of bondage.

And I will also ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs, even while you are in bondage; and this will I do that ye may stand as witnesses for me hereafter, and that ye may know of a surety that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions.

And now it came to pass that the burdens which were laid upon Alma and his brethren were made light; yea, the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord. [Mosiah 24:12–15]

The Lord hears the prayers of your heart. The feelings of your heart, of love for our Heavenly Father and for His Beloved Son, can be so constant that your prayers will ascend always. Some of you have, perhaps without thinking of my request that you pray, brought down on us all the blessings of heaven tonight through the feelings of your hearts.

I must add to my pleading a warning. You have the right and the obligation to choose for yourselves. You can search the scriptures or not. You can choose to work hard enough, to ponder, and to obey His commandments, so that the Holy Ghost can be your companion.

Then you will come to know the Savior better and better and your heart will swell with love for Him, or you can choose to delay. You can choose to drift, deciding past efforts will be enough.

My warning is a simple matter of cause and effect. Jesus Christ is the light and the life of the world. If we do not choose to move toward Him, we will find that we have moved away.

For I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance;

Nevertheless, he that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven;

And he that repents not, from him shall be taken even the light which he has received; for my Spirit shall not always strive with man, saith the Lord of Hosts. [D&C 1:31–33]

We are promised that if we always remember Him and keep His commandments we will have His Spirit to be with us. That light to our feet will grow dim if we choose to delay or to drift.

There is also a warning for us as we are faced with the choice whether or not to try harder to have our hearts drawn out in prayer continually to God. Perhaps the thought will come into your mind that tonight is not the time to begin an earnest effort to pray with more faith. Or the thought may come that prayer is not important to you. You may know with certainty the source of such thoughts:

And now, my beloved brethren, I perceive that ye ponder still in your hearts; and it grieveth me that I must speak concerning this thing. For if ye would hearken unto the Spirit which teacheth a man to pray ye would know that ye must pray; for the evil spirit teacheth not a man to pray, but teacheth him that he must not pray.

But behold, I say unto you that ye must pray always, and not faint; that ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he

will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul.
[2 Nephi 32:8–9]

Now for the sure promises. First, if you will let your heart be drawn to the Savior, to always remember Him, and to our Heavenly Father in prayer, you will have put on spiritual armor. You will be protected against pride because you will know that any success comes not from your human powers. And you will be protected against the thoughts which come rushing in upon us that we are too weak, too inexperienced, too unworthy to do what we are called of God to do to serve and help save His children. We can have come into our hearts the reassurance recorded in Moroni: “And Christ truly said unto our fathers: If ye have faith ye can do all things which are expedient unto me” (Moroni 10:23).

There is another sure promise. It is this: Whether or not you choose to keep your covenant to always remember Him, He always remembers you.

I testify that Jesus Christ, born in Bethlehem, was and is the Only Begotten of the Father, the Lamb of God. He chose from before the foundations of the earth to be your Savior, my Savior, and the Savior of all we will ever know or meet. I testify that He was resurrected and that because of His Atonement we may be washed clean through our faith to obey the laws and accept the ordinances of the gospel.

I testify that through the Prophet Joseph Smith the keys to administer those ordinances were restored and that they are now held by President Gordon B. Hinckley and that the authority to offer them is here.

I promise you that this day you will feel the influence of the Holy Ghost touch your heart as you search the scriptures with new purpose and as you pray earnestly. From that, you will this day have the assurance that God lives, that He answers prayers, that Jesus is the living Christ, and that He loves you. And you will

feel your love for Him increase. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.