

Steadfast in Our Covenants

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Since I was called just six months ago, I have felt a deep, God-given love for you, my dear sisters. My great desire for young women everywhere is that you know that you are loved—not only by me, but also by your parents and leaders, and especially by your Heavenly Father.

Sometimes it is hard to feel this love. A young woman I know looked like she had everything going for her. She had just won a student-body election, she had auditioned for the madrigal choir and made it, and she had been chosen as the junior prom queen. She went home from school one day and threw herself on her bed in tears. Her mother asked what was wrong, and the daughter blurted out, “I feel like a failure; nobody likes me; I don’t have any talents; I can’t keep up in my classes; and besides that, I’m ugly.” No one would suspect that she was feeling insecure, lonely, and inadequate; but most teens feel this way at one time or another.

And some young people suffer even more obvious hardships. For example, among the young women I know, one girl has a mother who is dying of cancer. One has divorced parents. One girl stays home alone on weekends while all her friends go out drinking. One young woman was in a debilitating accident. One girl’s father has been deployed for military service. One good sister worries about her wayward brother.

What can help the youth with these diverse and monumental problems? The Mutual theme this year, which is our focus tonight, provides an answer. It says, “Ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men” (2 Ne. 31:20). I love this scripture. It describes *how* we should face life’s challenges. When I press forward with hope and love, I also *feel* hope and love.

To be steadfast in Christ implies keeping covenants. Each week we renew our baptismal covenants to take His name upon us, to “always remember him,” and to “keep his commandments” (see D&C 20:77). We are steadfast in Christ when we do these things, and our spirits are lifted and our hearts are filled with love. Simply stated, when I keep my covenants, I feel hope and I feel love.

My young friend whom I’ll call Lindsey needed hope. She lived in a home which was devoid of the Spirit and of love. Her friends were wild, and even most of her Young Women leaders looked on her only as a “project.” But deep inside she felt that the Lord loved her, despite her deplorable situation. She focused on always remembering Him. She chose not to participate with her friends when they did bad things. She tried to worship Heavenly Father in the privacy of her own bedroom because she wanted to feel His Spirit in her life. Something in her wanted to be good, to keep His commandments. Even with her limited knowledge and lack of outside help,

she was trying to keep her baptismal covenants. She felt hope to carry on, and she felt love from Heavenly Father.

The Lord has promised us that He will not forget us because He has “graven [us] upon the palms of [His] hands” (Isa. 49:16). And our promise to Him is that we will not forget Him, for we have engraven Him in our hearts.

The early Saints were taught this in their sufferings in Missouri. The Lord counseled them to wait “patiently on the Lord, for your prayers have entered into the ears of the Lord. ...

“Therefore, he giveth this promise unto you, with an immutable covenant that they shall be fulfilled; and all things wherewith you have been afflicted shall work together for your good” (D&C 98:2–3). This promise didn’t remove their trials, but it did comfort them, giving them hope for the future.

Likewise, Abraham pressed forward steadfastly, clinging to promises God had made him. Each time I read about Abraham’s walk to Mount Moriah to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice, I feel anxious for him. He did not know the outcome of that test as we know it from a historical perspective. He was walking into the unknown. Still he was steadfast. He was living on promises that the Lord would bless him. Whatever nervousness he may have felt didn’t deter him from pressing forward with a steadfastness in Christ.

Like the Saints in Missouri, Lindsey knew that in spite of her deplorable conditions, Heavenly Father hadn’t given up on her. His love was firm. She took comfort in the “immutable covenant” of His love—that “all things wherewith you have been afflicted shall work together for your good” (D&C 98:3). As with Abraham, hers was not an easy path to walk, yet she pressed forward. As she did so, she found help. One special Church leader loved and guided her. She grew closer to Heavenly Father and eventually found a young man who loved her, taught her much about the gospel, and married her.

At last many of the blessings she had longed for earlier in life were poured out upon her. She found she could have the Spirit in her own family and raise righteous children. Where once she was isolated and neglected, she now feels enveloped by love. This has come from pressing forward while waiting patiently on the Lord. Being steadfast in Christ brought hope to Lindsey as it will to each of us as we struggle with life’s challenges. The words the choir sings tonight will encourage us to come unto Him:

*It matters not what may befall,
What threat’ning hand hangs over me;
He is my rampart through it all,
My refuge from mine enemy.
Come unto him all ye depressed,
Ye erring souls whose eyes are dim,
Ye weary ones who long for rest.
Come unto him! Come unto him!*

While keeping covenants gives us hope to carry on, it also changes the heart. The Lord teaches in Jeremiah, “This shall be the covenant that I will make; ... I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts” (Jer. 31:33). Covenants enlarge our hearts and allow us to feel the “love of God and of all men” (2 Ne. 31:20). Remember, when we keep our covenants, we feel hope, and we feel love.

Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount the virtues of the heart such as love, forgiveness, and compassion. He taught us as His disciples to take His name and character upon us. This changes our hearts and blesses our

relationships with others. Elder Marvin J. Ashton said, “When we truly become converted to Jesus Christ, committed to Him, an interesting thing happens: our attention turns to the welfare of our fellowman, and the way we treat others becomes increasingly filled with patience, kindness, [and] a gentle acceptance” (“The Tongue Can Be a Sharp Sword,” *Ensign*, May 1992, 20).

Could you be more steadfast in Christ in your own homes, with your own family members? When you promise to take His name and characteristics upon you, it means you should speak a little softer, act a little kinder, serve your siblings more selflessly, and appreciate and help your parents more openly.

Our son did this long ago on a family trip. We had traveled many miles to see a beautiful castle. By the time we finally arrived, one of our younger daughters was tired and cross. She refused to get out of the car to take the short hike to the site we had come so far to see. Most of us felt impatient with her. But with gentleness our 14-year-old son lifted her on his back and carried her to the castle. That tense moment was softened by his quiet expression of love. That now lives in each of our memories more than the view of the castle.

Sometimes it is hardest in our own homes to be our best selves. It requires that diligent effort of “pressing forward.” But when you keep your covenants, you will learn to more fully love those to whom you are eternally bound. Then you will also be able to extend your love beyond that circle to others.

A number of years ago our family lived in Brazil for a short while. Two weeks before we were supposed to return home, we were in an auto accident. As we drove home in pouring rain from sacrament meeting, we entered a neighborhood intersection. A car pulled out from behind a parked vehicle and hit us broadside. Fortunately no one in either of the cars was injured, but the automobiles were both quite badly dented. As my husband, John, got out to discuss our plight with the other driver, I kept reminding him that it was not our fault. Soon he returned to the car and slowly drove back to the little farmhouse where we were living, with metal grinding against the tires on every rotation. The other car followed. All John said was, “I’ll explain later.”

When we got home, John found our little envelope of emergency cash, and he paid the family to get their car repaired. They happily left. I was astonished. Then John gathered our family together. He was somewhat apologetic as he explained his actions. “I know this accident was not our fault, but as I was negotiating with this family, the only thought in my head was that only a little over an hour ago I had covenanted with Heavenly Father to always act as He would. I knew that if He were standing in my position, He would have had compassion on this family and would have done all He could to help them.” What an exemplary husband and father! He had remembered his covenants. Acting with Christlike love, he had softened hearts.

I testify to you that when I remember my covenants each day, I do feel hope and I feel love. I know that being steadfast in Christ brings a perfect brightness of hope to me and a love of God and all men to my heart.

“What does the Father ask of us? What do the scriptures say? Have faith, have hope, live like his Son, help others on their way” (“He Sent His Son,” *Children’s Songbook*, 35; *Liahona*, Apr. 1992, F11). I pray that each of us will come unto Him for hope and follow His example of love, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

