

The Power, Joy, and Love of Covenant Keeping

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I invite each of us to evaluate how much we love the Savior, using as a measure how joyfully we keep our covenants.

I'd like to begin by sharing a story that touches my heart.

One evening a man called his five sheep to come into the shelter for the night. His family watched with great interest as he simply called, "Come on," and immediately all five heads lifted and turned in his direction. Four sheep broke into a run toward him. With loving kindness he gently patted each of the four on the head. The sheep knew his voice and loved him.

But the fifth sheep didn't come running. She was a large ewe that a few weeks earlier had been given away by her owner, who reported that she was wild, wayward, and always leading the other sheep astray. The new owner accepted the sheep and staked her in his own field for a few days so she would learn to stay put. He patiently taught her to love him and the other sheep until eventually she had only a short rope around her neck but was no longer staked down.

That evening as his family watched, the man approached the ewe, which stood at the edge of the field, and again he gently said, "Come on. You aren't tied down anymore. You are free." Then lovingly he reached out, placed his hand on her head, and walked back with her and the other sheep toward the shelter.¹

In the spirit of that story, I pray that the Holy Ghost will help us learn together tonight about covenant keeping. Making and keeping covenants means choosing to bind ourselves to our Father in Heaven and Jesus Christ. It is committing to follow the Savior. It is trusting Him and desiring to show our gratitude for the price He paid to set us free through the infinite gift of the Atonement.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland explained that "a covenant is a binding spiritual contract, a solemn promise to God our Father that we will live and think and act in a certain way—the way of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In return, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost promise us the full splendor of eternal life."² In that binding contract, the Lord sets the terms and we agree to keep them. Making and keeping our covenants is an expression of our commitment to become like the Savior.³ The ideal is to strive for the attitude best expressed in a few phrases of a favorite hymn: "I'll go where *you* want me to go. ... I'll say what *you* want me to say. ... I'll be what *you* want me to be."⁴

Why Make and Keep Covenants?

1. Covenant keeping strengthens, empowers, and protects.

Nephi saw in vision the significant blessings the Lord bestows upon covenant keepers: “And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the power of the Lamb of God, that it descended ... upon the covenant people of the Lord, ... and they were armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory.”⁵

I recently met a dear new friend. She testified that after she had received her temple endowment, she felt strengthened with the power to resist temptations she had previously struggled with.

As we keep our covenants, we also receive courage and strength to help us bear one another’s burdens. A heartbroken sister had a son who was experiencing a difficult mortal challenge. Because of her faith in her Relief Society sisters as covenant keepers, she courageously invited them to fast and pray for her son. Another sister expressed how she wished she had asked for similar prayers from her sisters. Years before, her own son was struggling. She wished she had invited them to help her family bear this burden. The Savior said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”⁶

Oh, sisters, we all have burdens to bear and burdens to share. An invitation to bear one another’s burdens is an invitation to keep our covenants. Lucy Mack Smith’s counsel to the first Relief Society sisters is more relevant today than ever before: “We must cherish one another, watch over one another, comfort one another and gain instruction, that we may all sit down in heaven together.”⁷ This is covenant keeping and visiting teaching at its finest!

The Book of Mormon reminds us that even the prophet Alma had to bear the burden of having a rebellious son. But Alma was blessed with covenant-keeping brothers and sisters in the gospel who were deeply converted unto the Lord and had learned what it meant to bear each other’s burdens. We are familiar with the verse in Mosiah that speaks of the great faith of Alma’s prayers in behalf of his son. But the record states that “the Lord ... heard the prayers *of his people*, and also the prayers of his servant, Alma.”⁸

We know that the Lord always rejoices “in the soul that repenteth,”⁹ but we desire above all to have our children follow the counsel of President Henry B. Eyring to “start early and be steady” in making and keeping covenants.¹⁰ Not long ago a thought-provoking and sincere question was raised in a council of priesthood and auxiliary leaders: do we really expect eight-year-olds to keep their covenants? As we counseled together, it was suggested that one way to prepare children to make and keep sacred baptismal covenants is to help them learn to make and keep a simple promise.

Faithful parents are entitled to know how to best teach to meet the needs of their children. As parents seek and act on personal revelation, counsel together, minister and teach the simple principles of the gospel, they will have power to strengthen and protect their families. Other family members can also help. My cute grandpa taught us the importance of keeping promises through a simple song. It went something like this: “Before you make a promise, consider well its importance. Then when made, engrave it upon your heart. Engrave it upon your heart.” That little song was taught with love, conviction, and power because Grandpa engraved his own promises on his heart.

A wise mother I know intentionally includes her children in her efforts to keep her covenants. She joyfully bears the burdens of neighbors, friends, and ward members—and comforts those who stand in need of comfort. It was not surprising when her young daughter recently came asking for help to know how to best comfort her friend

whose father had just passed away. That was a perfect setting to teach that her desire to comfort her friend was one way to keep her baptismal covenant. How can we expect children to make and keep temple covenants if we don't expect them to keep their first covenant—their baptismal covenant?

Elder Richard G. Scott observed, “One of the greatest blessings we can offer to the world is the power of a Christ-centered home where the gospel is taught, covenants are kept, and love abounds.”¹¹ What are some ways we can create such a home to prepare our children to make and keep temple covenants?

1. • We can discover together what it means to be worthy of a temple recommend.
2. • We can discover together how to listen to the Holy Ghost. Because the temple endowment is received by revelation, we need to learn that vital skill.
3. • We can discover together how to learn through the use of symbols, beginning with the sacred symbols of baptism and the sacrament.
4. • We can discover together why the body is sacred, why it is sometimes referred to as a temple, and how modest dress and grooming relates to the sacred nature of temple clothing.
5. • We can discover the plan of happiness in the scriptures. The more familiar we are with Heavenly Father's plan and the Atonement in the scriptures, the more meaningful temple worship will be.
6. • We can learn the stories of our ancestors together, research family history, index, and perform vicarious temple work for deceased loved ones.
7. • We can discover together the meaning of terms such as *endowment*, *ordinance*, *sealing*, *priesthood*, *keys*, and other words related to temple worship.
8. • We can teach that we go to the temple to make covenants with Heavenly Father—we return home to keep them!¹²

Let us remember the concept of “good, better, and best” as we teach.¹³ It is good to teach our children about the temple. It is better to prepare and expect them to make and keep covenants. It is best to show them by example that we cheerfully cleave to our own baptismal and temple covenants! Sisters, do we realize our vital role in the work of salvation as we nurture, teach, and prepare children to progress along the covenant path? The power to do so will come as we honor and keep our covenants.

2. Keeping covenants is essential for true happiness.

President Thomas S. Monson taught, “Sacred covenants are to be revered by us, and faithfulness to them is a requirement for happiness.”¹⁴ In 2 Nephi we read, “And it came to pass that we lived after the manner of happiness.”¹⁵ Earlier in this same chapter we learn that Nephi and his people had just built a temple. Surely they were joyful covenant keepers! And in Alma we read, “But behold there never was a happier time among the people of Nephi, since the days of Nephi, than in the days of Moroni.”¹⁶ Why? Again we learn in a previous verse that they “were faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord.”¹⁷ Covenant keepers are commandment keepers!

I love the scripture that reads: “And now when the people had heard these words [meaning the words describing the baptismal covenant], they clapped their hands for joy, and exclaimed: This is the desire of our hearts.”¹⁸ I love the desire of their hearts. They cheerfully desired to make and keep their covenants!

One Sunday a young sister joyfully exclaimed, “I get to take the sacrament today!” When was the last time we rejoiced in that privilege? And how do we demonstrate it? We do this by *always* remembering the Savior and

always keeping His commandments, which include keeping His Sabbath day holy. We do it by *always* remembering Him as we *always* have our personal and family prayers, daily scripture study, and weekly family home evenings. And when we get distracted or casual with these important things, we repent and begin again.

Making and cheerfully keeping our covenants gives validity and life to the vital sacred and saving ordinances we need to receive in order to obtain “all that [the] Father hath.”¹⁹ Ordinances and covenants are the “spiritual milestones” President Henry B. Eyring referred to when he taught: “The Latter-day Saints are a covenant people. From the day of baptism through the spiritual milestones of our lives, we make promises with God and He makes promises with us. He *always* keeps His promises offered through His authorized servants, but it is the crucial test of our lives to see if *we* will make and keep our covenants with Him.”²⁰

3. Keeping our covenants demonstrates our love for the Savior and our Father in Heaven.

Of all the reasons we ought to be more diligent in our covenant keeping, this reason is more compelling than all—love. A verse in the Old Testament is one that touches my heart as we consider the principle of love. Who of us is not moved by Jacob and Rachel’s biblical love story as we read, “And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her”?²¹ Sisters, do we keep our covenants with that kind of deep and devoted love?

Why was the Savior willing to keep His covenant with the Father and fulfill His divine mission to atone for the sins of the world? It was His love for His Father and His love for us. Why was the Father willing to allow His Only Begotten and perfect Son to suffer pain beyond description to bear the sins, heartaches, sicknesses, and infirmities of the world and all that is unfair in this life? We find the answer in these words: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.”²²

“If we fully appreciated the many blessings which are ours through the redemption made for us, there is nothing that the Lord could ask of us that we would not anxiously and willingly do.”²³ According to this statement by President Joseph Fielding Smith, covenant keeping is one way to express our love for the incomprehensible, infinite Atonement of our Savior and Redeemer and the perfect love of our Father in Heaven.

Elder Holland movingly suggested, “I am not certain just what our experience will be on Judgment Day, but I will be very surprised if at some point in that conversation, God does not ask us exactly what Christ asked Peter: ‘Did you love me?’”²⁴ Tonight I invite each of us to evaluate how much we love the Savior, using as a measure how joyfully we keep our covenants. The Savior said, “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.”²⁵ How we all need a regular manifestation of the Savior in our daily lives!

Let us remember that even those who have been wayward in the past or who are currently struggling can feel the touch of the Good Shepherd’s hand upon their heads and hear His voice saying: “Come on. You aren’t tied down anymore. You are free.” The Savior said, “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”²⁶ He can say that because He kept His covenants with love. The question then is, will we? May we go forth with faith, cheerful hearts, and a great desire to be covenant keepers. This is how we demonstrate our love for our Father in Heaven and our Savior, both of whom I testify with great love in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See D. Todd Christofferson, “You Are Free,” *Ensign*, Mar. 2013, 38, 40; or *Liahona*, Mar. 2013, 16, 18.
2. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Keeping Covenants: A Message for Those Who Will Serve a Mission,” *New Era*, Jan. 2012, 3; or *Liahona*, Jan. 2012, 49.
3. See “Understanding Our Covenants with God,” *Ensign*, July 2012, 25; or *Liahona*, July 2012, 23.
4. “I’ll Go Where You Want Me to Go,” *Hymns*, no. 270; emphasis added.
5. 1 Nephi 14:14.
6. John 13:35.
7. Lucy Mack Smith, in *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society* (2011), 25.
8. Mosiah 27:14; emphasis added.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 18:13.
10. See Henry B. Eyring, “Spiritual Preparedness: Start Early and Be Steady,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2005, 37–40.
11. Richard G. Scott, “For Peace at Home,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2013, 30.
12. See D. Todd Christofferson, “The Gospel Answers Life’s Problems and Challenges” (worldwide leadership training meeting, Feb. 2012); lds.org/broadcasts.

13. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Good, Better, Best,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2007, 104.
14. Thomas S. Monson, “Happiness—the Universal Quest,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1993, 4; or *Liahona*, Mar. 1996, 5.
15. 2 Nephi 5:27.
16. Alma 50:23.
17. Alma 50:22.
18. Mosiah 18:11.
19. Doctrine and Covenants 84:38.
20. Henry B. Eyring, “Witnesses for God,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 30; emphasis added.
21. Genesis 29:20.
22. John 3:16.
23. Joseph Fielding Smith, “Importance of the Sacrament Meeting,” *Relief Society Magazine*, Oct. 1943, 592.
24. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The First Great Commandment,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2012, 84.
25. John 14:21.

26. John 10:11.

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