

Grateful in Any Circumstances

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Have we not reason to be filled with gratitude, regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves?

Over the years, I have had the sacred opportunity to meet with many people whose sorrows seem to reach the very depths of their soul. In these moments, I have listened to my beloved brothers and sisters and grieved with them over their burdens. I have pondered what to say to them, and I have struggled to know how to comfort and support them in their trials.

Often their grief is caused by what seems to them as an ending. Some are facing the end of a cherished relationship, such as the death of a loved one or estrangement from a family member. Others feel they are facing the end of hope—the hope of being married or bearing children or overcoming an illness. Others may be facing the end of their faith, as confusing and conflicting voices in the world tempt them to question, even abandon, what they once knew to be true.

Sooner or later, I believe that all of us experience times when the very fabric of our world tears at the seams, leaving us feeling alone, frustrated, and adrift.

It can happen to anyone. No one is immune.

We Can Be Grateful

Everyone's situation is different, and the details of each life are unique. Nevertheless, I have learned that there is something that would take away the bitterness that may come into our lives. There is one thing we can do to make life sweeter, more joyful, even glorious.

We can be grateful!

It might sound contrary to the wisdom of the world to suggest that one who is burdened with sorrow should give thanks to God. But those who set aside the bottle of bitterness and lift instead the goblet of gratitude can find a purifying drink of healing, peace, and understanding.

As disciples of Christ, we are commanded to “thank the Lord [our] God in all things,”¹ to “sing unto the Lord with thanksgiving,”² and to “let [our] heart be full of thanks unto God.”³

Why does God command us to be grateful?

All of His commandments are given to make blessings available to us. Commandments are opportunities to

exercise our agency and to receive blessings. Our loving Heavenly Father knows that choosing to develop a spirit of gratitude will bring us true joy and great happiness.

Being Grateful *for* Things

But some might say, “What do I have to be grateful *for* when my world is falling apart?”

Perhaps focusing on what we are grateful *for* is the wrong approach. It is difficult to develop a spirit of gratitude if our thankfulness is only proportional to the number of blessings we can count. True, it is important to frequently “count our blessings”—and anyone who has tried this knows there are many—but I don’t believe the Lord expects us to be less thankful in times of trial than in times of abundance and ease. In fact, most of the scriptural references do not speak of gratitude *for* things but rather suggest an overall spirit or attitude of gratitude.

It is easy to be grateful *for* things when life seems to be going our way. But what then of those times when what we wish for seems to be far out of reach?

Could I suggest that we see gratitude as a disposition, a way of life that stands independent of our current situation? In other words, I’m suggesting that instead of being thankful *for* things, we focus on being thankful *in* our circumstances—whatever they may be.

There is an old story of a waiter who asked a customer whether he had enjoyed the meal. The guest replied that everything was fine, but it would have been better if they had served more bread. The next day, when the man returned, the waiter doubled the amount of bread, giving him four slices instead of two, but still the man was not happy. The next day, the waiter doubled the bread again, without success.

On the fourth day, the waiter was really determined to make the man happy. And so he took a nine-foot-long (3-m) loaf of bread, cut it in half, and with a smile, served that to the customer. The waiter could scarcely wait for the man’s reaction.

After the meal, the man looked up and said, “Good as always. But I see you’re back to giving only two slices of bread.”

Being Grateful *in* Our Circumstances

My dear brothers and sisters, the choice is ours. We can choose to limit our gratitude, based on the blessings we feel we lack. Or we can choose to be like Nephi, whose grateful heart never faltered. When his brothers tied him up on the ship—which he had built to take them to the promised land—his ankles and wrists were so sore “they had swollen exceedingly,” and a violent storm threatened to swallow him up in the depths of the sea. “Nevertheless,” Nephi said, “I did look unto my God, and I did praise him all the day long; and I did not murmur against the Lord because of mine afflictions.”⁴

We can choose to be like Job, who seemed to have everything but then lost it all. Yet Job responded by saying, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return ... : the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”⁵

We can choose to be like the Mormon pioneers, who maintained a spirit of gratitude during their slow and

painful trek toward the Great Salt Lake, even singing and dancing and glorying in the goodness of God.⁶ Many of us would have been inclined to withdraw, complain, and agonize about the difficulty of the journey.

We can choose to be like the Prophet Joseph Smith, who, while a prisoner in miserable conditions in Liberty Jail, penned these inspired words: “Dearly beloved brethren, let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed.”⁷

We can choose to be grateful, no matter what.

This type of gratitude transcends whatever is happening around us. It surpasses disappointment, discouragement, and despair. It blooms just as beautifully in the icy landscape of winter as it does in the pleasant warmth of summer.

When we are grateful to God *in* our circumstances, we can experience gentle peace in the midst of tribulation. In grief, we can still lift up our hearts in praise. In pain, we can glory in Christ’s Atonement. In the cold of bitter sorrow, we can experience the closeness and warmth of heaven’s embrace.

We sometimes think that being grateful is what we do *after* our problems are solved, but how terribly shortsighted that is. How much of life do we miss by waiting to see the rainbow before thanking God that there is rain?

Being grateful in times of distress does *not* mean that we are pleased with our circumstances. It *does* mean that through the eyes of faith we look beyond our present-day challenges.

This is not a gratitude of the lips but of the soul. It is a gratitude that heals the heart and expands the mind.

Gratitude as an Act of Faith

Being grateful *in* our circumstances is an act of faith in God. It requires that we trust God and hope for things we may not see but which are true.⁸ By being grateful, we follow the example of our beloved Savior, who said, “Not my will, but thine, be done.”⁹

True gratitude is an expression of hope *and* testimony. It comes from acknowledging that we do not always understand the trials of life but trusting that one day we will.

In any circumstance, our sense of gratitude is nourished by the many and sacred truths we *do* know: that our Father has given His children the great plan of happiness; that through the Atonement of His Son, Jesus Christ, we can live forever with our loved ones; that in the end, we will have glorious, perfect, and immortal bodies, unburdened by sickness or disability; and that our tears of sadness and loss will be replaced with an abundance of happiness and joy, “good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over.”¹⁰

It must have been this kind of testimony that transformed the Savior’s Apostles from fearful, doubting men into fearless, joyful emissaries of the Master. In the hours following His Crucifixion, they were consumed with despair and grief, unable to understand what had just happened. But one event changed all of that. Their Lord appeared to them and declared, “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself.”¹¹

When the Apostles recognized the risen Christ—when they experienced the glorious Resurrection of their beloved Savior—they became different men. Nothing could keep them from fulfilling their mission. They

accepted with courage and determination the torture, humiliation, and even death that would come to them because of their testimony.¹² They were not deterred from praising and serving their Lord. They changed the lives of people everywhere. They changed the world.

You do not need to see the Savior, as the Apostles did, to experience the same transformation. Your testimony of Christ, born of the Holy Ghost, can help you look past the disappointing endings in mortality and see the bright future that the Redeemer of the world has prepared.

We Are Not Made for Endings

In light of what we know about our eternal destiny, is it any wonder that whenever we face the bitter endings of life, they seem unacceptable to us? There seems to be something inside of us that resists endings.

Why is this? Because we are made of the stuff of eternity. We are eternal beings, children of the Almighty God, whose name is Endless¹³ and who promises eternal blessings without number. Endings are not our destiny.

The more we learn about the gospel of Jesus Christ, the more we realize that endings here in mortality are not endings at all. They are merely interruptions—temporary pauses that one day will seem small compared to the eternal joy awaiting the faithful.

How grateful I am to my Heavenly Father that in His plan there are no true endings, only everlasting beginnings.

Those Who Are Grateful Will Be Made Glorious

Brothers and sisters, have we not reason to be filled with gratitude, regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves?

Do we need any greater reason to let our hearts “be full of thanks unto God”?¹⁴

“Have we not great reason to rejoice?”¹⁵

How blessed we are if we recognize God’s handiwork in the marvelous tapestry of life. Gratitude to our Father in Heaven broadens our perception and clears our vision. It inspires humility and fosters empathy toward our fellowmen and all of God’s creation. Gratitude is a catalyst to all Christlike attributes! A thankful heart is the parent of all virtues.¹⁶

The Lord has given us His promise that those “who [receive] all things with thankfulness shall be made *glorious*; and the things of this earth shall be added unto [them], even an hundred fold, yea, more.”¹⁷

May we “live in thanksgiving daily”¹⁸—especially during the seemingly unexplainable endings that are part of mortality. May we allow our souls to expand in thankfulness toward our merciful Heavenly Father. May we ever and constantly raise our voices and show by word and deed our gratitude to our Father in Heaven and to His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ. For this I pray, and leave you my testimony and blessing, in the name of our Master, Jesus Christ, amen.

1. Doctrine and Covenants 59:7; see also Ephesians 5:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Mosiah 26:39; Alma 7:23;

Doctrine and Covenants 98:1.

2. Psalm 147:7.

3. Alma 37:37.

4. See 1 Nephi 18:10–16.

5. Job 1:21.

6. For examples of pioneers who maintained a cheerful attitude despite intense difficulty, see Andrew D. Olsen, *The Price We Paid: The Extraordinary Story of the Willie and Martin Handcart Pioneers* (2006), 10, 366–67.

7. Doctrine and Covenants 123:17.

8. See Alma 32:21.

9. Luke 22:42.

10. Luke 6:38.

11. Luke 24:39.

12. See Romans 5:3; 2 Corinthians 4:17; 12:10.

13. See Moses 1:3.

14. Alma 37:37.

15. Alma 26:13.

16. See Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Oratio Pro Cnæo Plancio*, XXXIII, section 80; quoted in Joseph B. Wirthlin, “Live in Thanksgiving Daily,” *Ensign*, Sept. 2001, 8.

17. Doctrine and Covenants 78:19; emphasis added.

18. Alma 34:38.