

Are You Still Willing?

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Our willingness to follow Jesus Christ is directly proportionate to the amount of time we commit to be in holy places.

One Sunday, while I was preparing to partake of the sacrament after several weeks of stake conference assignments, an interesting and powerful thought passed through my mind.

As the priest began offering the blessing on the bread, words I had heard so many times before pressed forcefully upon my mind and heart. “And *witness unto thee*, O God, the Eternal Father, 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*.”¹ How many times have we witnessed unto God that we are willing?

As I pondered the significance of those sacred words, the word *willing* impressed me as never before. A flood of sweet and sacred experiences filled my mind and heart with love and gratitude for the atoning sacrifice of the Savior and His crucial role in the Father’s plan of redemption for my family and me. Then I heard and felt the penetrating words of the prayer on the water: “That they may witness unto thee ... that they do always remember him.”² I understood clearly in that moment that keeping my covenants must be more than good intentions.

Partaking of the sacrament is not a passive religious ritual implying our mere consent. It is a powerful reminder of the reality of the Savior’s infinite Atonement and the need to always remember Him and keep His commandments. Willingness to focus on the Savior is so crucial it is the central message of the two most quoted scriptures in the Church: the sacrament prayers. Understanding the truth of what Heavenly Father so willingly offers each of us through His Only Begotten Son should evoke our utmost efforts to always be willing in return.

Is our own spiritual foundation built solidly on Jesus Christ?

If our spiritual foundation is shallow or superficial, we might be inclined to base our willingness on a social cost-benefit analysis or a personal inconvenience index. And if we embrace the narrative that the

Church consists primarily of outdated or politically incorrect social policies, unrealistic personal restrictions, and time commitments, then our conclusions about willingness will be flawed. We should not expect the principle of willingness to trend positively with social media influencers or TikTok enthusiasts. The precepts of men rarely align with divine truth.

The Church is a gathering place for imperfect individuals who love God and who are willing to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. That willingness is rooted in the reality that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. This divine truth can be known only by the power of the Holy Ghost. Therefore, our willingness is directly proportionate to the amount of time we commit to be in holy places where the influence of the Holy Ghost is present.

We would do well to spend more time in meaningful conversation discussing our concerns with a loving Father in Heaven and less time seeking the opinions of other voices. We could also choose to change our daily news feed to the words of Christ in the holy scriptures and to prophetic words of His living prophets.

The importance we place on our Sabbath day observance, paying an honest tithe, holding a current temple recommend, attending the temple, and honoring our sacred temple covenants are all powerful indicators of our willingness and evidence of our commitment. Are we willing to put forth more than a superficial effort into strengthening our faith in Christ?

Heavenly Father loves us perfectly, but that love comes with great expectations. He expects us to willingly place the Savior at the very center of our lives. The Savior is our perfect example of willingness to submit to the Father in all things. He is “the way, the truth, and the life.”³ He willingly atoned for our sins. He willingly eases our burdens, calms our fears, gives us strength, and brings peace and understanding to our hearts in times of distress and grief.

Yet faith in Jesus Christ is a choice. “If [we] can no more than desire to believe”⁴ in His words, we have a starting point to begin or to reset our journey of faith. His words, if planted in our hearts like a seed and nourished with great care, will take root and our faith will grow into assurance and become a principle of action and power. The Book of Mormon is our most powerful resource for growing and restoring our faith. Willingness is the catalyst of faith.

Mortality, by divine design, is not easy and at times can be overwhelming. However, “[we] are, that [we] might have joy”!⁵ Focusing on the Savior and our covenants brings lasting joy! The purpose of mortality is to prove our willingness. “*The great task of life* [and the cost

of discipleship] is to learn the will of the Lord and then to do it.”⁶ True discipleship leads to a fulness of joy. Are we willing to pay the price of discipleship?

The covenant path is not a simple checklist; it is a process of spiritual growth and deepening commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. The central purpose of every commandment, principle, covenant, and ordinance is to build faith and trust in Christ. Our determination to center our lives on Christ, therefore, must be consistent—not conditional, situational, or superficial. We cannot afford to take vacation days or personal time off from our willingness to “stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places.”⁷ Discipleship is not cheap, because the companionship of the Holy Ghost is priceless.

Surely the Lord was thinking of our day as He taught the parable of the ten virgins. Of the five who were wise, He said they “have taken the Holy Spirit for their guide, and have not been deceived,”⁸ while the lamps of the foolish “are gone out” for lack of oil.⁹ Perhaps the words of Nephi best describe these once-faithful members of the Church: “And others he will pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion.”¹⁰

Carnal security is seeking for and trusting in worldly things instead of Christ—in other words, looking through a secular lens instead of a spiritual lens. The Holy Ghost gives us the capacity to see “things as they really are, and ... as they really will be.”¹¹ Only “by the power of the Holy Ghost [can we] know the truth of all things”¹² and be not deceived. We place Christ at the center of our lives and pledge our willingness to obey His commandments not because we are blind but because we can see.¹³

What about the foolish virgins? Why were they unwilling to carry a vessel of spiritual oil? Did they simply procrastinate? They were perhaps too casual because it was inconvenient or seemed unnecessary. Whatever the reason, they were deceived about the crucial role of Christ. This is Satan’s fundamental deception and why their lamps of testimony eventually went out for lack of spiritual oil. This parable is a metaphor for our time. Many leave the Savior and their covenants long before they leave His Church.

We live in unprecedented times long foretold by ancient prophets, a day when Satan rages “in the hearts of the children of men, and stir[s] them up to anger against that which is good.”¹⁴ Far too many of us live in a virtual world awash in entertainment and messaging hostile to divine identity and belief in Christ.

The most powerful spiritual influence in the life of a child is the righteous example of loving parents and grandparents who faithfully keep their own sacred covenants. Intentional parents teach their children faith in the Lord Jesus Christ so that they too “may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins.”¹⁵ Casual and inconsistent covenant keeping leads to spiritual casualty. The spiritual damage is often greatest on our children and grandchildren. Parents and grandparents, are we still willing?

President Russell M. Nelson has warned that “in coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost.”¹⁶ This is a clear and unmistakable warning to trim our lamps and increase our spiritual oil reserves. Are we still willing to follow the living prophets? What is the level of spiritual oil in your lamp? What changes in your personal life would enable you to have the influence of the Holy Ghost more constantly?

Today, as in the times of Jesus, there will be those who will turn back, unwilling to accept the price of discipleship. As harsh and hateful criticism is increasingly leveled at the Savior’s Church and those who follow Him, our discipleship will require a greater willingness to straighten and strengthen our spiritual spines and heed them not.¹⁷

If our spiritual foundation is built solidly on Jesus Christ, we will not fall and we need not fear.

“Behold, the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind; and the willing and obedient shall eat the good of the land of Zion in these last days.”¹⁸

May we always be willing. In the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Doctrine and Covenants 20:77; emphasis added.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 20:79.
3. John 14:6.
4. Alma 32:27.
5. 2 Nephi 2:25.
6. Ezra Taft Benson, “The Great Commandment—Love the Lord,” *Ensign*, May 1988, 4.
7. Mosiah 18:9.
8. Doctrine and Covenants 45:57.
9. Matthew 25:8.
10. 2 Nephi 28:21.
11. Jacob 4:13.
12. Moroni 10:5.
13. See Boyd K. Packer, “Agency and Control,” *Ensign*, May 1983, 66.
14. 2 Nephi 28:20.
15. 2 Nephi 25:26.
16. Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2018, 93.
17. See 1 Nephi 8:26–27, 33.
18. Doctrine and Covenants 64:34.