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# **“Small and Simple Means”**

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Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles**

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My dear brothers and sisters, it is an honor for me to speak to you today together with President M. Russell Ballard and Elder Randall K. Bennett, of the Seventy, together with our wives.

Last September, Elder Bennett and I with a number of others had a chance to visit the Priesthood Restoration Site in Harmony, Pennsylvania, on the banks of the Susquehanna River. As most of you know, this is the place where Joseph Smith and his wife Emma lived during the second and third years of their married life; where their first child was born, died soon after birth, and lies buried; and where the majority of the Book of Mormon was translated. In the woods near this home, John the Baptist appeared and conferred the Aaronic Priesthood on Joseph and Oliver Cowdery, and somewhere not too far away, Peter, James, and John later conferred the Melchizedek Priesthood and holy apostleship upon them. It was in the Susquehanna River close to Joseph and Emma’s home that Joseph and Oliver baptized and ordained one another as directed by John the Baptist.

The Restoration was in its infancy—the Book of Mormon not yet published, the Church not yet organized, the flow of recorded revelation that would make up the Doctrine and Covenants just beginning. The Church has reconstructed the home of Joseph and Emma on its original site, together with the larger home of Emma’s parents, Isaac and Elizabeth Hale, close by. We entered Joseph and Emma’s re-created home with a feeling of reverence. As I stood at the fireplace in the relatively small main room that served for cooking, dining, and every other purpose except sleeping, I reflected on their meager resources and humble circumstances. I looked at the small table, similar to something they would have had in that space, and in my mind’s eye envisioned the Prophet seated at one side with the golden plates on the table before him, perhaps covered with a cloth, and Oliver Cowdery on the other side of the table with his little ink pot, turkey quill pen, and the paper that was so expensive and difficult to obtain in those days. I imagined them there, hour upon hour, as Joseph, using the Urim and Thummim or his

own seer stone, dictated the revealed text while Oliver faithfully wrote down what the Prophet spoke.

It seemed almost incredible that in this small space and brief moment in time, far beyond the notice or concern of the world, with such rudimentary instruments as a feather quill for a pen, a centuries-old scriptural record was being translated into English by the gift and power of God; that over the next 200 years, the Book of Mormon would be translated into more than 100 languages and printed in more than 180 million copies; that the coming forth of this book signaled the beginning of the last and greatest gospel dispensation in the history of the earth; and that this book would be the instrument needed to accomplish the long-prophesied gathering of scattered Israel, the Lord's covenant people. The Book of Mormon was designed by God to change the course of history and to play a key role in achieving His purposes in the salvation of His children.

As I stood there marveling, two phrases from the Book of Mormon came to mind: first from Nephi, "And thus we see that by small means the Lord can bring about great things,"<sup>1</sup> and then from Alma, "The Lord God doth work by means to bring about his great and eternal purposes; and by very small means the Lord doth confound the wise and bringeth about the salvation of many souls."<sup>2</sup> What is true of the Lord's work in His Church and across the world is also true for each of us individually and in our families—God works in us by small and simple means, "And out of small things proceedeth that which is great"<sup>3</sup> in our lives.

What are the small and simple means by which our Redeemer and the Holy Spirit may work in us to convert weakness to strength, replace ungodliness with holiness, and otherwise bring to pass our immortality and eternal life?<sup>4</sup> There are many, but let me mention just three.

Certainly, one is prayer. If we are to have His help, including in our day-to-day concerns, we need more or less constant recourse to our Heavenly Father in prayer. He can and will guide us in the small and simple things as well as the things of greater consequence—which, though we may not realize it, are usually one and the same. Prayer is one of the principal means by which we come to know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.<sup>5</sup> Prayer keeps us centered on our Heavenly Father and His love and expectations for us. "For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart?"<sup>6</sup>

Let your prayers typically include some quiet time, time when you are listening and feeling. Often in those moments will come answers, promptings, understanding, gentle correction, and sometimes just simply reassurance and peace. Gather your families in family prayer each morning and evening. All of you will be strengthened as you pray for one another by name and seek the Lord's blessing and help for the needs and activities ahead. Parents, remember also to set an example of gratitude for your children

by thanking your Heavenly Father often for the blessings He constantly bestows upon you and your family.

Secondly, our regular access to the scriptures is another one of the seemingly small means by which the Lord can bring to pass great things in our lives. In your individual study, I commend to you the counsel of President Howard W. Hunter. He noted that so many of us, with our Type A personalities, when we study the scriptures think in terms of numbers of chapters or pages we will read each day as a goal. President Hunter's advice was not to approach it that way (unless, of course, the Prophet asks us to read the Book of Mormon by the end of the year). Rather, we should commit a certain amount of time each day, half an hour or whatever it might be, to immerse ourselves in the scriptures, studying, thinking, meditating, praying, and recording what we learn or the direction we may receive. It wouldn't or shouldn't matter how much we read. Quantity is not the issue. Remember that being in the scriptures in this intentional way facilitates communion with heaven, and we can expect to receive light and understanding whether it be related to what we are studying at the moment or anything else the Lord desires to communicate.

I think one of the best things I have done as a father has been to read the scriptures with my wife and children, especially the Book of Mormon. I can't say that every time we sat down to read together it was a wonderful spiritual experience. Sometimes there was some complaining, and occasionally when we read in the mornings, one or another would fall asleep. To be honest, I have to admit that once in a while I was the one who was guilty of falling asleep. Nevertheless, as we continued this practice day after day and year after year, our children came to understand the voice of the Lord as it is found in the scriptures, again especially in the Book of Mormon, which we read several times. With regard to those who search the scriptures, the Lord has said, "You can testify that you have heard my voice, and know my words."<sup>7</sup> Our children now know the words of the Lord and recognize His voice, the voice of the Spirit. They can turn to the scriptures at any time for guidance, comfort, and counsel. Recalling Alma's statement, the word of God has had a more powerful effect upon the minds of my children than anything else that has happened to them.<sup>8</sup>

I have heard many comments this year about experiences with our home-centered, Church-supported approach to gospel learning, where teaching at Church is designed to complement the *Come, Follow Me* curriculum for individuals and families at home. These comments range from unbridled enthusiasm to disappointment that home has not yet become the "sanctuary of faith"<sup>9</sup> President Nelson speaks about. I suppose most of us are somewhere along the spectrum between those two feelings. May I suggest that you re-read Elder Quentin L. Cook's talk titled, "Deep and Lasting Conversion to Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" that he gave in October General Conference last year when *Come, Follow Me* was introduced, and also President Henry B. Eyring's talk from the same conference titled, "Try, Try, Try." For pretty much everyone, perfection is still

pending, so don't be discouraged. The promised blessings will be realized over time as we go forward, doing the best we can in our particular circumstances. The promises are sure.

For my third and concluding example of essential small and simple things, I would like to quote from an article by Brother Clayton M. Christensen, where he talks about finding and following the Lord's will and purpose for each of us. Brother Christensen lives in the Boston area and is a man of exceptional reputation in the business and academic worlds and beyond. He has been an admired member of the Harvard Business School faculty. He has served the Church in many callings, including that of Area Seventy, and we have probably never had a more devoted and effective member-missionary in the Church. Professor Christensen used to deliver a lecture on the last day of class about meaning and happiness in life that was very popular. The Class of 2010 requested that he speak to them about how to apply the principles he taught in their personal lives, and the *Harvard Business Review* published his presentation under the title, "How Will You Measure Your Life?"

Brother Christensen taught:

"For me, having a clear purpose in my life has been essential. But it was something I had to think long and hard about before I understood it. When I was a Rhodes scholar, I was in a very demanding academic program, trying to cram an extra year's worth of work into my time at Oxford. I decided to spend an hour every night reading, thinking, and praying about why God put me on this earth. That was a very challenging commitment to keep, because every hour I spent doing that, I wasn't studying applied econometrics. I was conflicted about whether I could really afford to take that time away from my studies, but I stuck with it—and ultimately figured out the purpose of my life.

"Had I instead spent that hour each day learning the latest techniques for mastering the problems of autocorrelation in regression analysis, I would have badly misspent my life. I apply the tools of econometrics a few times a year, but I apply my knowledge of the purpose of my life every day. It's the single most useful thing I've ever learned. I promise my students that if they take the time to figure out their life purpose, they'll look back on it as the most important thing they discovered at [Harvard Business School]. If they don't figure it out, they will just sail off without a rudder and get buffeted in the very rough seas of life."<sup>10</sup>

Clayton's wise statement brings to mind the words of the Prophet Joseph Smith from Liberty Jail:

“You know, brethren, that a very large ship is benefited very much by a very small helm in the time of a storm, by being kept workways with the wind and the waves.

“Therefore, . . . 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.”<sup>11</sup>

We have the rudder of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ to guide us in fulfilling the purpose of our mortal life. And beyond our shared purpose, we have the blessing of personal revelation to teach us particular added purposes He has in mind for each of us individually. Finally, we have the grace of God the Father and His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to empower us to do and become all that our Father in Heaven envisions. Thus, finding out specifically what the Lord has in mind for us individually, and cheerfully doing what we can, however great or small, to fulfill that purpose, will permit us to live “with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God and for [His power] to be revealed” in our lives.

I bless you that your service to the Lord and your fellowman will bring you great joy and that you and those who depend on you will have the strength to deal with any challenges that may come in the years ahead. I bear witness of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whose Church this is, and of the divine authenticity of the calling of President Russell M. Nelson.

We now have the privilege of listening to the words of President M. Russell Ballard, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. May we listen carefully and faithfully follow his counsel. May all of you enjoy the peace the gospel brings and the constant protecting care of our Heavenly Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Nephi 16:29.

<sup>2</sup> Alma 37:7.

<sup>3</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 64:33.

<sup>4</sup> See Moses 1:39.

<sup>5</sup> See John 17:3.

<sup>6</sup> Mosiah 5:13.

<sup>7</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 18:36.

<sup>8</sup> See Alma 31:5.

<sup>9</sup> See Russell M. Nelson, “Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2018, 113.

<sup>10</sup> Clayton M. Christensen, “How Will You Measure Your Life?” *Harvard Business Review*, July-August 2010, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 123:16-17.