

**“By Small and Simple Things Are Great Things Brought to Pass”
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Several years ago, while visiting Panama, Elder Christofferson and I had the privilege of visiting the Panama Canal. Not only did we see the canal, but we got to visit the command center where the doors of the locks were controlled. Accessing that command center required us to walk across the narrow top edge of one set of closed doors of one of the locks by holding on to thin ropes on each side that served as railings. The lock on the left was full of water, only about four feet beneath us, but the water in the lock on the right was at its lowest level—a drop of seven stories! We kept our eyes on the left side.

At the command center we learned how the canal functioned. A series of locks brings a ship, in stair-step fashion, from the Pacific Ocean into a central lake at a higher elevation. The ship would then cross the lake to a second set of locks. These locks would move the ship down to the Atlantic Ocean. The process, of course, would be reversed for ships moving from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

What we found interesting was that there is no pumping of water into or out of these massive locks to raise or lower the water level. Water flows down through the locks on either side from the central lake by gravity. This works because there is an ample and constant flow of water into the lake from the surrounding rain forest. The climate is ideal for providing the quantity of water that the canal needs to function.

We thought it was stunning that massive cargo ships weighing 120,000 tons, or cruise ships 11 stories high with over 3,000 passengers plus crew, could move through this canal because of tiny raindrops that come together to form tiny rivulets, then streams, then rivers to fill the lake *and* provide for that necessary constant flow of water.

Now let me shift gears for a minute and talk about an experience I had a few months ago. I was sitting in a testimony meeting. As we often do, I was thinking about what I might say if I were to bear my testimony. Usually when people stand up, they have something special to say, some faith-promoting experience that happened in the past week or month. But I must admit nothing like that came to mind. I couldn't think of anything particularly remarkable. I'm embarrassed to say that I didn't get up to bear my testimony that day.

The irony is, I do have a strong testimony of Jesus Christ and the Restoration of His true Church in these latter days. But in reflecting on the past, I realized that my testimony didn't come with one stunning event or miracle. It came by small whisperings of the Spirit. It came line upon line and precept upon precept as I heeded the words of modern prophets, studied the scriptures, followed worthy examples, and tried to apply gospel principles in my life. I haven't been perfect in these endeavors, but I have seen the hand of the Lord in my life and count that a great blessing. And parenthetically, I'd like to say that this is by itself ample reason to stand up and bear testimony at any time.

When I think of these two very different events—visiting the Panama Canal and attending that testimony meeting—I am reminded of the scripture in Alma 37:6, which says, “By small and simple things are great things brought to pass.” While it is incredible that small drops of rain can move gigantic ships through the Panama Canal, it is even more incredible that we can receive a constant flow of spiritual impressions, even outpourings, from a Heavenly Father who is ever mindful of us. I have found that it isn't in great miracles that a testimony is kept vibrant, but in the small day-to-day affirmations and directions we receive from heaven as we strive to come unto our Savior, keep His commandments, and “be about [our] Father's business.”¹

Small and simple things are found in doing the basics, such as praying and studying the scriptures and acting in faith upon the promptings we receive from the Holy Ghost. These have always been stressed as actions that bring spiritual growth. Maybe just looking at them a little differently will help that growth even more. When we pray, can we accept “no” as an answer? Usually, we will find out in time that the Lord had helped us grow more with that “no” than the “yes” we sought. At times, maybe we just need to alter our prayer a bit. Let me give you an example.

My friend Maralee had six children, ranging in age from newborn to early teens, who had full and busy schedules. Her husband traveled much at times with his work. Dealing with a newborn's round-the-clock need for feeding and attention can be a challenge to any mother, but she had an added burden. Her next youngest son had asthma and was prone to serious attacks in the night. She would just get one child settled and then need to attend to the other, sometimes for hours. She would pray for healing for her asthmatic son or at least that he would be able to sleep through the night. Nothing seemed to change. She was finding it difficult to cope with all the daytime demands placed upon her. Then her prayers changed. She began to pray that whatever sleep she did get would be sufficient

for her to perform well the tasks of the following day. She told me that this prayer was answered in the affirmative. She no longer felt tired, even on just a few hours of sleep. While she didn't get the blessing she sought at the outset, she found the one she needed. It was a small thing but, in its own way, most miraculous.

Here's another thought about the way changing one's prayers brings a needed "breakthrough." When Elder Robert D. Hales was serving as mission president in the England London Mission, a young French sister missionary came to him seeking a blessing. She did not understand English when she was called to this mission, but she made it her goal to pray and study hard. She did make good progress for a time but then hit a plateau and didn't seem to progress any further. He laid his hands on her head to give her a blessing but then stopped. He received this revelation: he removed his hands and told her, "If you will thank the Lord for what you have already received, you will be able to progress further." She humbly followed this counsel and was able to progress rapidly in her fluency in English and became a wonderful missionary.

And speaking of giving thanks, we show even more gratitude to our Father in Heaven when we actually note in writing those blessings we have received. President Eyring told of a habit he had made of jotting down a few lines each day after pondering this question: "Have I seen the hand of God reaching out to touch us or our children or our family today?" He said:

"As I kept at it, something began to happen. As I would cast my mind over the day, I would see evidence of what God had done for one of us that I had not recognized in the busy moments of the day. As that happened, and it happened often, I realized that trying to remember had allowed God to show me what He had done.

"More than gratitude began to grow in my heart. Testimony grew. I became ever more certain that our Heavenly Father hears and answers prayers. I felt more gratitude for the softening and refining that come because of the Atonement of the Savior Jesus Christ. And I grew more confident that the Holy Ghost can bring all things to our remembrance—even things we did not notice or pay attention to when they happened."²

Now another thought on prayer: when we pray, do we have the courage to ask the Lord, "What lack I yet?"³ We may think the Savior would be rolling His eyes and saying, "Oh, where do I begin? The list is sooooo long!" We've read that question being put to the Savior by a rich young man. He was told, "Go and sell that thou hast, . . . and come and follow me."⁴ Now, I doubt the Savior will answer you with such a tall order. But I'm sure His answer will be suited to our abilities. It could be something like "Write a note of encouragement to Sister so-and-so," or "Try to say more positive things than negative things," or "Turn off that TV show. It will allow the Spirit to return to your home." Prompt obedience to such impressions is such a small thing, but it will bring increased ability to hear and follow further promptings from the Holy Ghost.

In getting closer to our Savior Jesus Christ, studying the scriptures—especially the Book of Mormon—goes hand in hand with prayer. I was inspired by President Russell M. Nelson’s challenge in the 2018 women’s session of general conference, when he asked us to read the entire Book of Mormon before the end of the year. He not only gave that challenge but also added that we should mark each reference to Jesus Christ.⁵ My daughter, daughters-in-law, and I set out to do just that, and we set up a group text to encourage each other and share things we had learned.

After more than a month into our reading program, my daughter Brynn texted this: “I haven’t had any real insight recently, but I just have to say that my week has gone so much better than I would have expected because I was doing my reading.” When I thought about what she said, I had to admit the very same thing had happened to me. I had had a tough week with lots of pressure and demands on my time and energy, but somehow I just felt at peace all the time. To me those daily study periods in the Book of Mormon were the spiritual raindrops I needed to help me put things in perspective and keep me focused on the things that matter. I’ve read the Book of Mormon several times, but when I finished reading the Book of Mormon that time, I found how much richer my relationship with our Savior had become by focusing on Him. Those raindrops had formed a pool of spiritual strength that I will forever cherish. President Russell M. Nelson said this recently:

“When I think of the Book of Mormon, I think of the word *power*. The truths of the Book of Mormon have the *power* to heal, comfort, restore, succor, strengthen, console, and cheer our souls....I promise that as you prayerfully study the Book of Mormon *every day*, you will make better decisions—*every day*. I promise that as you ponder what you study, the windows of heaven will open, and you will receive answers to your own questions and direction for your own life.”⁶

I add my own witness that these things are indeed true.

One faithful member taught me how faithfulness in one seemingly small thing could change lives. Geniel Young, mother of six children, became divorced after 26 years of marriage and was now the sole breadwinner, with little or no support for her family. She got a job in a secretarial pool in a large Detroit, Michigan, hospital, but her family still struggled financially. For instance, when their water heater gave out, for six months they had to boil water on the stove to take baths because there was no money to fix the water heater.

Her son, Brent, recalled: “One vivid memory I have is my mother often crying in prayer behind her closed door. At one point, when our circumstances became especially constrained, she prayed more earnestly for answers and guidance. I know that she continued to pay tithing and offerings before other bills were paid. I am not sure what she

paid in offerings, but it could not have been much. Around this time, there was an article in the *Ensign* [by Elder Henry D. Taylor] which had the following counsel regarding offerings: ‘We can, we ought, and we must do better...*If we will double our fast offerings we shall increase our prosperity, both spiritually and temporally.* This the Lord has promised.’⁷

“She stared at the article, not knowing how she could possibly pay more,” Brent said, “but she felt like she asked the question and was reading the answer meant just for her. So, she followed the counsel and doubled her offering.” Almost immediately the following things happened: a plumbing problem developed, the front porch’s storm door blew off in the strong Michigan winter wind, the vacuum cleaner broke, the car needed a new transmission, the furnace gave out and needed a new motor, one child chipped a tooth requiring a visit to the dentist, another child broke his glasses, and one child accidentally broke a neighbor’s basement window.

With all this, Sister Young continued to pray but felt an even greater sense of desperation. She felt she had no choice but to find another job. So she put together a résumé and went to her boss and asked for a couple of personal days off work. He pressed her to know why. Reluctantly, she told him of her situation and that she couldn’t live on what she was making and needed to find a higher-paying job. He was understanding and asked her to give him a little time, but he did not give her the time off. Within a couple of days, he came back and handed her a check for \$2,000 and gave her a permanent raise by that amount. This was in 1974, and that amount would be equivalent to \$11,000 today.

Six months later another position opened, and she was encouraged to apply. She did and got the position of administrative assistant for the hospital’s chief of staff. This position came with a substantial raise. That additional income was life-changing for the family.

I was impressed by Sister Young’s determination to follow the promptings of the Spirit in doing what may seem to us just a little thing (though it was much bigger for her). But more than this, I was impressed with her unshaken faith even when everything went wrong after doing the very thing she knew the Lord wanted her to do. Like handcart pioneers of old, she just kept going forward anyway, one step at a time. In humility she submitted herself to the Lord’s timetable, and eventually darkness did turn to light.

My dear sisters, I know that as we strive to stay consistently faithful even in small things, they will flow together to strengthen us spiritually in remarkable ways. As we look back, we will indeed see the hand of the Lord reaching down to bless us in a constant and marvelous manner.

¹ Luke 2:49.

² Henry B. Eyring, “O Remember, Remember,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2007, 67.

³ Matthew 19:20.

⁴ Matthew 19:21.

⁵ See Russell M. Nelson, “Sisters’ Participation in the Gathering of Israel,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 69–70.

⁶ Russell M. Nelson, “The Book of Mormon: What Would Your Life Be Like without It?” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2017, 62–63.

⁷ Marion G. Romney, quoted in Henry D. Taylor, “The Law of the Fast,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1974, 14.