

“The Simplicity of this Beautiful Gospel”

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Sisters, it is so good to be with you today! The last couple months I have felt Heaven’s love for you, and I know that ‘where two or three are gathered in His name, He is here with us!’¹

Some of the experiences I have felt inspired to share are very near and dear to my heart and I pray that the Holy Ghost will be here because I know He is the True Teacher!

My sweet sister held onto my dad’s shirts for over sixteen years and recently helped us sew these keepsake quilts that bring back so many sweet memories such as this precious moment when my dad was holding our oldest child, Drew, in the NICU after a scary delivery. My dad passed away unexpectedly a few years after this picture at the age of fifty-seven, but we have experienced so many tender mercies that have helped us know that He is often nearer than we realize and very aware of our needs as is our Father in Heaven. Everyone loved my dad’s laugh! He loved life and I have no doubt that is because he lived the simple truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He also had a great love for church history and musicals which I’m grateful he passed on to me and my family. About 30 years ago while he was visiting the Kirtland area with friends, he fell in love with the Amish people’s incredible woodworking skills and brought me home this Edelweiss music box that I have always treasured.

Years ago, I was struggling with a difficult challenge. In despair I dropped to my knees in fervent prayer pleading for peace and hope for a brighter day. I poured my heart out to my Heavenly Father, and I don’t need to share all of the details, but I had a very sacred experience that involved my cherished music box and I believe, my sweet father. This song is so beautiful and so simple, and the words came into my mind and heart as never before. I knew in that moment that Heavenly Father was aware of my struggles, that He knew my righteous desires and the goodness of my heart, and He knew how hard I was trying to do His will. I received a flood of light and perspective that taught me valuable lessons that continue to bless my life and that I hope will bless each of you as well!

Edelweiss is a rare and beautiful flower that blooms up high in the Alps. You would think this would not be ideal growing conditions for a flower but somehow the sturdy Edelweiss endures the cold and the rocky terrain. Maybe that is because it is right there close to heaven—communing with heaven each day—being reminded of its worth, turning towards the Sun and growing slowly and patiently. I think we can relate to this flower in many ways living in the world we live in today!

As I read the words to this song, I would love it if you could each think about these words as if a loving Father in Heaven was speaking them to *you*, His daughter!

“Edelweiss, Edelweiss
Ev'ry morning you greet me.
Small and White
Clean and bright
You look happy to meet me.
Blossom of snow may you bloom and grow.
Bloom and grow forever
Edelweiss, edelweiss
Bless my homeland forever.”²

The Spirit taught me that day and continues to teach me these six truths:

1. Heavenly Father and our Savior know us by name, and they know our hearts!
2. It matters not what the world thinks of us or how “small” we might feel!
3. It matters that we come to Him each morning and learn from Him each day!
4. It matters that we are clean and pure!
5. If we focus on the Savior, we can be happy; even joyful!
6. Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ desire us to “bloom and grow” forever!

Let's explore each of these 6 truths.

Heavenly Father and Our Savior, Jesus Christ Know Us by Name and They Know Our Hearts

Our oldest child, Drew, turned in his mission papers long before many of his close friends and yet, his friends were all receiving their mission calls before he did. After waiting two months for his call, he told us that he was willing to serve wherever he was needed even if that meant serving a service mission from home. Within a week, we were asked to meet with his stake president who said that one of the Twelve Apostles asked if Drew would be willing to serve a service mission. Drew replied, “I am willing to serve wherever the Lord needs me.” The Spirit touched all our hearts that day with a witness that the Lord had a mission for Drew!

A few weeks later, Elder Walker started serving at the Motion Picture Studio. The first couple days he started having thoughts such as, “Why am I here when my friends are all out teaching the gospel and baptizing? Is what I'm doing really making a difference?”

On his third day, he went out to the set in Goshen where the Bible videos, *The Chosen*, and some of the Book of Mormon videos have been filmed. In a quiet moment, the Spirit whispered to him, “You are here for a purpose. You just don’t know it yet.”

A week later, the General Young Men’s presidency came to meet the service missionaries and told them that by helping make these Book of Mormon videos they were helping all the missionaries in the mission field share the gospel. Elder Walker was reminded by the Spirit that he was there for a purpose.

Eighteen months into his mission, Elder Walker received an e-mail from one of his high school friends serving a proselyting mission in Canada. His friend shared that he was teaching a single Mom and a nine-year-old boy, and they were having a hard time helping the young boy understand the Book of Mormon. They were able to share the 3 Nephi Book of Mormon videos with this family and he said this little boy had tears streaming down his face as he watched Jesus come down from the sky. He said, “When I see Jesus, I want to hug Him!” That is when Elder Walker said he knew for sure what the purpose of his mission was even though his friends are the ones out baptizing people, helping with the Book of Mormon videos is helping them gather Israel and he has felt the Spirit confirm that this is what he was called to do.

I know that Heavenly Father knew young Joseph Smith’s heart in the Sacred Grove when He called him by name! I know Jesus knew Mary’s broken heart at the empty tomb when He brought healing to her heart by speaking her name! And I know our Heavenly Father and Savior know each of us and our hearts and they can help us come to know the mission we each have been placed on earth to fulfill! Like our son Drew, often our life mission is much different than we anticipated but I know that if we are humble and willing the Lord can help us fulfill the measure of our creation and bless lives in the process!

It Matters Not What the World Thinks of Us or How “Small” We Might Feel

This last summer, we were taught a profound lesson by our cute little six-year-old in Nauvoo. I had always wanted to visit the church history sites and was so excited to finally be planning a trip with our family when a friend encouraged us to apply to serve in the Nauvoo and British Pageants. It was a little unknown and scary—kind of like speaking in BYU Women’s Conference—but the Spirit confirmed that we should apply. We were a little relieved when we were told they didn’t have room for us but a few months later a family dropped out and we were needed!

Miraculously things worked out for us to be able to go and we are all so grateful! There were some late nights and tired kids but I’m guessing my dad knew we needed this opportunity to put aside the things of this world, to serve, and to learn about our ancestors who sacrificed so much to follow the Lord and His living prophet! My husband, Andy, as our bishop, was able to set us apart as special representatives of the church and we had an incredible testimony strengthening experience while growing closer together as a family—not just because of the tight quarters and one bath!

One night after performing, I was horrified to see our little six-year-old Jacob completely dressed in costume digging through a turned over garbage can! I was relieved when I realized it was completely full of these rejected wood souvenirs. The wood used this last summer was a little defective so it would often split or not burn the image as well as was expected. Our sweet Jacob was saving some of these imperfect souvenirs. Despite the cracks and faults, Jacob knew that these wood pieces would bring so much joy to him and his new little friends as they rolled them down the hill. He was right! Those children had so much fun with those discarded souvenirs that seemed like garbage to the rest of the world, but our little Jacob saw that they had worth, and they had a mission to fulfill to bring joy and laughter to these children.

Jacob reminded us that it doesn't matter what the world thinks of us or how small and insignificant, forsaken and rejected we may feel; it only matters what our Heavenly Father and our Savior think of us, and they know of our infinite worth as children of God. They can magnify our efforts as we serve in our homes, in our church callings and in our other responsibilities in faith. Each of us are needed to play a part in the gathering of Israel!

Two years ago, I had ACL surgery on my knee. I was so happy when I was finally able to just barely get the bicycle pedals to rotate a few times during physical therapy. I was so excited to show my family my progress when I got home but was so discouraged when I realized I could not do it! I tried and tried again with no success. Then, I felt the Spirit whisper, "Stop focusing on your weakness and focus on your strength!"

It was incredible the difference it made when I listened to that prompting. I had been focusing so much on the pain and weakness in my weak leg and had not realized that my strong leg had enough power to get the momentum going and basically drag my weak leg around to make the full rotation.

Sisters, Jesus Christ is our strength! If we tap into His power, we can do all things no matter how weak and insignificant we may feel. He can use us in and often because of our weakness which makes us humble to draw on His strength.

After Paul asked the Lord three times to remove the "thorn in his flesh" the Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."³

I know by focusing on Him and His strength He can use us despite our weakness to accomplish His great work.

It Matters That We Come to Him Each Morning and Learn from Him Each Day

Don't we love Mary and Martha? I love that Martha received Jesus into her home and that Mary sat at Jesus' feet.⁴ In our world, there are so many things that we can be encumbered about with—or in other words, distracted by and worried about—but the one thing I have learned is needful for me to have the perspective I need to serve without becoming weary or judging myself

or my sister is to come learn from the Master Teacher each day! When I come to feel His love for me, I have more to give. If I feast on His words and drink from His living water, I can love and serve Him and love and serve my neighbor—and maybe be willing to let some things go or delegate to others who also want to serve the Master.

I love that Martha later goes to the Savior with faith, knowing that He is the Christ and that He has the power to raise her brother from the dead. Then, she went and called her sister Mary who was sitting, grieving in her house, to join them as they went and witnessed that great miracle.⁵ I am so grateful we can all come to see the Savior and His miracles as we study the scriptures and listen to His living prophets.

President Benson said, “The most important prophet, so far as we are concerned, is the one who is living in our day and age. This is the prophet who has today’s instructions from God to us. God’s revelation to Adam did not instruct Noah how to build the ark. Every generation has need of the ancient scripture, plus the current scripture from the living prophet. Therefore, the most crucial reading and pondering that you should do is of the latest inspired words from the Lord’s mouthpiece. That is why it is essential that you have access to and carefully read his words.”⁶

Yes, “we thank thee O God, for a prophet to guide us in these latter days.”⁷

I know that studying the word of the Lord—particularly the Book of Mormon and words of the living prophets—really does change us and that scripture power is a real thing! I know that as we prioritize the Lord and willingly come to Him each morning in prayer and study, His words each day we will bless us immeasurably. I have also learned that when life gets busy and we really don’t think we have the time, He can magnify our studies to meet our needs if we just put Him first. He never fails us when we choose Him!

It Matters That We Are Clean and Pure

Hugh Nibley taught, “Who is righteous? Anyone who is repenting. No matter how bad he has been, if he is repenting, he is a righteous man. There is hope for him. And no matter how good he has been all his life, if he is not repenting, he is a wicked man. The difference is which way you are facing.”⁸

Does this quote give anyone else hope? Sisters, I know by your desire to be here today that you are facing in the right direction! You are facing upward! You are striving to change and become better each day. That is the essence of repentance! Repentance can be a great big event for some people like Alma the Younger⁹ and Saul¹⁰, but for most of us repentance is change. Refocusing, realigning with the will of God and being willing to take a step of faith in that direction to follow Him and walk with Him.

Sometimes we get frustrated that we need to start over, but we need to remember that we are starting over with experience and with the Savior by our side and we are getting stronger as we learn to lean more on Him and submit to His will.

I was very humbled to feel over this last weekend that I was once again supposed to start over on a new talk after my original somehow deleted off my computer a couple weeks ago. The Lord has been tutoring me as He often does. Repentance and change are not easy, but they are necessary to become clean and pure and more like our Savior Jesus Christ.

One of my favorite quotes is from C.S. Lewis and I think of it often. It says, “Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.”¹¹

Are we experiencing what President Nelson has called the “joy of daily repentance”? Are we preparing for and partaking of the sacrament weekly and doing those things that allow the holy spirit to sanctify us with fire? President Nelson urged us to “start today to experience the joy of putting off the natural man. The Savior loves us always but especially when we repent.”¹² I know that as we do these things that cleanse and purify our hearts and desires that He will be with us. He will abide in us! And that, my dear sisters, is worth every uncomfortable change we are asked to make.

If We Focus on the Savior, We Can be Happy; Even Joyful

I loved it when Sister Reeves shared this profound testimony, “Sisters, I do not know why we have the many trials that we have, but it is my personal feeling that the reward is so great, so eternal and everlasting, so joyful and beyond our understanding that in that day of reward, we may feel to say to our merciful, loving Father, ‘Was that *all* that was required?’ I believe that if we could remember and recognize the depth of that love our Heavenly Father and our Savior have for us daily, we would be willing to do anything to be back in Their presence again, surrounded by Their love eternally. What will it matter, dear sisters, what we suffered here if, in the end, those trials are the very things which qualify us for eternal life and exaltation in the kingdom of God with our Father and Savior?”¹³

In Hebrews, it says that in order to endure the cross, Jesus focused on *joy!*¹⁴ President Nelson asked, “And what was the joy that was set before Him? Surely it included the joy of cleansing, healing, and strengthening us; the joy of paying for the sins of all who would repent; the joy of making it possible for you and me to return home—clean and worthy—to live with our Heavenly Parents and families. If we focus on the joy that will come to us, or to those we love, what can we endure that presently seems overwhelming, painful, scary, unfair, or simply impossible?”¹⁵

In last October’s General Conference, the word “joy” jumped out at me in almost every talk. Then, in this last April General Conference, the word “covenants” jumped out at me in almost

every message. I couldn't help putting the two together and pondered how making and keeping our sacred covenants brings so much joy into our lives!

Serving in the temple brings so much joy into my life. Many years ago, I came out of the temple to find a note on my windshield that said that a church youth group had washed my windows to thank me for serving in the temple that day. It was made clear to me in that moment that just as the youth had cleaned my windshield, when we go to the temple our lenses are cleaned. We have the power to discern things we wouldn't have, and we can see more clearly what is real, what is important and what is not. We can better determine what is truly needful in our lives. In those sacred walls we can also be reminded that our "afflictions shall be but a small moment"¹⁶ and be consecrated for our gain.

We were so touched a couple weeks ago while attending the temple to see a dear friend who has been such a blessing to our children as a loving elementary school teacher. We learned that she and her husband have been dedicating their Friday nights to serve as temple workers together since losing their young son unexpectedly two years ago. I am grateful for the healing peace we can feel in the House of the Lord, and I am sure their son is close by as they are serving on both sides of the veil. I know that we too can find peace to cope with life's challenges as we put the Lord first in our lives and dedicate time to serve in the temple.

President Nelson has said, "The joy we feel has little to do with the circumstances of our lives and everything to do with the focus of our lives. When the focus of our lives is on God's plan of salvation and Jesus Christ and His gospel, we can feel joy regardless of what is happening—or not happening—in our lives. Joy comes from and because of Him. He is the source of all joy."¹⁷

Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ Desire Us to "Bloom and Grow" Forever

Sisters, Heavenly Father does not expect us to be perfect now! Why do we expect perfection from ourselves? Elder Uchtdorf has reminded us that "God is fully aware that you and I are not perfect... God is also fully aware that the people you think are perfect are not.... many of you are endlessly compassionate and patient with the weaknesses of others. Please remember to also be compassionate and patient with yourselves."¹⁸

Do you ever wonder if we are just going around in circles? Sisters, if we are living by the doctrine of Christ, we are progressing! Our changes might be hard for us to see but they are noticed by our Father in Heaven. I know our Savior is helping us slowly but surely move up that circular staircase as we live the principle of faith in Jesus Christ; as we strive to repent and obey, as we make and keep covenants, and as we receive and recognize the gift of the Holy Ghost while repeating this beautiful pattern in our daily walk of discipleship with Him!

One of our favorite memories from Nauvoo was attending the temple. After the younger kids did baptisms, Andy and I took Elder Walker to do an endowment session. While sitting in the Celestial room, we were embraced by the beautiful music of the Nauvoo Bagpipe Band playing "Praise to the Man" as they marched in front of the temple. My favorite line of that song is "Sacrifice brings forth the blessings of Heaven."¹⁹

My mom always said, “When you say *yes* to one thing, you are saying *no* to another”. This has been very helpful throughout my life. Our hearts want to do *all* the good things! We can also flip this around to realize that we have to say *no* to some things—even some good things—and let them *go* in order to say *yes* to other things that will help us *grow*! I know that the Spirit can help us see the weeds that need pulled and the dead heading that needs to be done so that we can fully receive the sun or *Son* and fully bloom where we are planted! Like the five wise virgins, we can choose to do those needful or *best* things day by day to add oil to our lamps so that we can have the Holy Spirit as our guide!²⁰

I know as we learn to make sacrifices to overcome the world and take upon ourselves His name, we will find rest in our Savior and be better able to love and serve Him and others; blooming and growing and blessing the lives of our brothers and sisters!

We have to be careful not to be too hard on ourselves—which is hard for us sisters—because as we draw closer to Him, we will see more clearly. Seeing more clearly will cause us to see all the work we have to do! But don’t listen to Satan’s discouraging lies; listen to our Savior who is inviting us to ‘come to Him and be not heavy laden’.²¹ Those who lose their lives for his sake will find it!²² He wants to share with us the growth and blooming that comes from enjoying the simplicity of His gospel!

The last line of Edelweiss says, “Bless my homeland forever.”²³ I testify that our Savior can bless our homes with His light and love, and He has provided the way for us to come back home when this journey is through. We can be assured that He has a wonderful place waiting for us, His covenant daughters who love Him and choose to follow Him. I hope you know that you are loved, you are needed, your efforts do make a difference and no one else can take your place!

Sisters, my prayer for us is that we can set aside the complexity of this world and focus on the simple truths and light of His gospel and those things that matter most. That we can greet our Father in Heaven each morning so He can be with us throughout every day of our mission here on earth. That we can willingly give him our all, no matter how small and weak our attempts may seem, so He can strengthen us and help us reach our full potential. I pray that we can experience the joy that comes from being clean and bright, pure and white, ever ready to enter His presence! I hope that we can feel joy in meeting Him often in His holy house! I know that He is so grateful for our efforts and that only in and through Him can we bloom and grow forever to become more like Him and eventually receive a fulness of joy in His courts above!

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

¹ See Matthew 18:20.

² The Sound of Music, 1959.

³ See 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.

⁴ See Luke 10

⁵ See John 11

⁶ Teachings of Presidents of the Church, Ezra Taft Benson, Chapter 11.

⁷ Hymn 19.

⁸ Hugh Nibley, “Approaching Zion,” volume 9 of The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley

⁹ See Mosiah 27 and Alma 36.

¹⁰ See Acts 9.

¹¹ C. S. Lewis, "Mere Christianity," 1960.

¹² Pres Nelson, "The Power of Spiritual Momentum," April 2022.

¹³ Sister Reeves, "Worthy of our Promised Blessings," October 2015.

¹⁴ Hebrews 12:2.

¹⁵ President Russell M. Nelson, "Joy and Spiritual Survival," October 2016.

¹⁶ Doctrine and Covenants 121:7.

¹⁷ President Russell M. Nelson, "Joy and Spiritual Survival," October 2016.

¹⁸ Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Forget me Not," October 2011

¹⁹ Hymn 27.

²⁰ See Matthew 25.

²¹ Matthew 11:28.

²² Matthew 10:39.

²³ The Sound of Music, 1959.