

# Gratitude amid Chaos

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Welcome to winter semester 2021. It is a new semester and a new year. With a new year we tend to reflect on the past and hope that the upcoming year will be better—especially when the past has been exceptionally turbulent. We can't be sure what the future will bring, but we are cautiously hopeful that things will be better, even though we know that turbulent times still lie ahead.

In a recent message from President Russell M. Nelson, he shared with us “a remedy”<sup>1</sup> to help us through the turbulent times we are sure to face. That remedy is “the healing power of gratitude.”<sup>2</sup> It is a remedy that can truly fill us with hope.

An example of this is illustrated in the book *The Hiding Place*. It is the true story of Corrie ten Boom, a Dutch woman who, with her family, hid Jews during World War II. Eventually their efforts were discovered. As a result, Corrie and her sister Betsie were sent to a concentration camp. Miraculously, they were allowed to keep their Bible in secret. They lived in miserable conditions. The barracks

in which they lived were overcrowded and had no individual beds. There were makeshift beds in three levels in a building designed for 400 people but holding 1,400. The bedding was soiled and rancid. At one point, Corrie was discouraged and nauseated and decided to lie down. But she quickly sprang back up, pinching her legs because she was being bitten by fleas. She desperately asked:

*“Betsie, how can we live in such a place!” . . .*

*“Corrie!” [her sister Betsie] said excitedly. “He’s given us the answer! Before we asked, as He always does! In the Bible this morning. Where was it? Read that part again!”*

*I glanced down the long dim aisle to make sure no guard was in sight, then drew the Bible from its pouch. “It was in First Thessalonians,” I said. . . . In the feeble light I turned the pages. “Here it is: ‘Comfort the frightened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. . . .’” It seemed written expressly to [our concentration camp].*

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*Peggy S. Worthen, wife of BYU president Kevin J. Worthen, delivered this devotional address on January 12, 2021.*

*“Go on,” said Betsie. “That wasn’t all.”*

*“Oh yes: ‘. . . to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus—’”*

*“That’s it, Corrie! That’s His answer. ‘Give thanks in all circumstances!’ That’s what we can do. We can start right now to thank God for every single thing about this new barracks!”*

*I stared at her, then around me at the dark, foul-aired room.*

*“Such as?” I said.*

*“Such as being assigned here together.”*

*I bit my lip. “Oh yes, Lord Jesus!”*

*“Such as what you’re holding in your hands.”*

*I looked down at the Bible. “Yes! Thank You, dear Lord, that there was no inspection when we entered here! Thank You for all the women, here in this room, who will meet You in these pages.”*

*“Yes,” said Betsie. “Thank You for the very crowding here. Since we’re packed so close, that many more will hear!” She looked at me expectantly. “Corrie!” she prodded.*

*“Oh, all right. Thank You for the jammed, crammed, stuffed, packed, suffocating crowds.”*

*“Thank You,” Betsie went on serenely, “for the fleas and for—”*

*The fleas! This was too much. “Betsie, there’s no way even God can make me grateful for a flea.”*

*“‘Give thanks in **all** circumstances,’” she quoted. “It doesn’t say, ‘in pleasant circumstances.’ Fleas are part of this place where God has put us.”*

*And so we stood between piers of bunks and gave thanks for fleas. But this time I was sure Betsie was wrong.<sup>3</sup>*

They began holding Bible study in the barracks. As they did, the spirit in the barracks changed. At first the Bible study was held in a corner. But they began to notice that the guards did not interrupt them in their barracks, so they grew bolder. They began holding two services a night. They could not understand why they were never interrupted in their barracks when everywhere else they were closely supervised. This continued for several weeks.

Corrie then related:

*One evening I got back to the barracks late from a wood-gathering foray outside the walls. . . . Betsie was waiting for me, as always, so that we could wait through the food line together. Her eyes were twinkling.*

*“You’re looking extraordinarily pleased with yourself,” I told her.*

*“You know we’ve never understood why we had so much freedom in the big room,” she said. “Well—I’ve found out.”*

*That afternoon, she said, there’d been confusion in her knitting group about sock sizes and they’d asked the supervisor to come and settle it.*

*“But she wouldn’t. [The supervisor] wouldn’t step through the door and neither would the guards. And you know why?”*

*Betsie could not keep the triumph from her voice: “Because of the fleas! That’s what she said, ‘That place is crawling with fleas!’”*

*My mind rushed back to our first hour in this place. I remembered Betsie’s bowed head, remembered her thanks to God for creatures I could see no use for.<sup>4</sup>*

The story of Corrie and Betsie ten Boom may be familiar, but it is a reminder of the importance of finding gratitude in all aspects of our lives.

Being grateful not only lifts our souls through its miraculous healing balm but is, as Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf pointed out, a commandment.<sup>5</sup> Elder Uchtdorf asked, “Why does God command us to be grateful?”<sup>6</sup> To which he answered:

*All of [God’s] 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.<sup>7</sup>*

Being grateful is a commandment from God, and being grateful blesses our lives through obedience to that commandment. When we express our gratitude to our Heavenly Father for all things, we are humbled as we acknowledge our dependence on Him. And as we acknowledge our dependence on our Heavenly Father and all He does for us, we realize His eternal love for us and

His desire for us to have joy in this life. President Nelson emphasized this as he asked:

*Does gratitude spare us from sorrow, sadness, grief, and pain? No, but it does soothe our feelings. It provides us with a greater perspective on the very purpose and joy of life.*<sup>8</sup>

Whether we are right in the middle of a global pandemic, experiencing devastating loss and grief, or experiencing the joyful moments of life, we must never forget to express gratitude. Elder Uchtdorf stated:

*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.”*<sup>9</sup>

In the Doctrine and Covenants, we are told that “in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments.”<sup>10</sup> We are also told that “the day cometh that they who will not hear the voice of the Lord, neither the voice of his servants, neither give heed to the words of the prophets and apostles, shall be cut off from among the people.”<sup>11</sup>

Heavenly Father has given us everything. He has given us a Savior who has atoned for our sins. He has given us prophets and apostles. He has given us the gospel of Jesus Christ. He has given us commandments that bring us blessings and peace. He has given us blessings too numerous for us to count. Why? Because He desires us to return to Him so that we can “be made glorious.”<sup>12</sup>

It is my prayer that we will always be filled with gratitude, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. Russell M. Nelson, “The Healing Power of Gratitude,” video message shared on social media, Church of Jesus Christ, 20 November 2020. Transcript available in Nelson, “The Story Behind My Global Prayer of Gratitude,” *Inspiration* (blog), 20 November 2020, Church of Jesus Christ, [churchofjesuschrist.org/inspiration/the-story-behind-my-global-prayer-of-gratitude?lang=eng](http://churchofjesuschrist.org/inspiration/the-story-behind-my-global-prayer-of-gratitude?lang=eng).

2. Nelson, “Healing Power.”

3. Corrie ten Boom, with John and Elizabeth Sherrill, *The Hiding Place* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), 197–99; emphasis in original.

4. Ten Boom, *Hiding Place*, 208–9.

5. See Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Grateful in Any Circumstances,” *Ensign*, May 2014.

6. Uchtdorf, “Grateful.”

7. Uchtdorf, “Grateful.”

8. Nelson, “Healing Power.”

9. Uchtdorf, “Grateful”; emphasis in original; quoting Luke 6:38.

10. D&C 59:21.

11. D&C 1:14.

12. D&C 78:19.