

Responding to the Savior's Invitation: "Come"

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Thank you, President Samuelson, for that kind introduction. And thank you, Brother Kooyman, for your prayer. Brother Kooyman and I first met in Athens, Ohio. We served together in a branch presidency there. Our families enjoyed many wonderful experiences together. We were fortunate enough to both receive offers to come to BYU in 1997. Each week Brother Kooyman and I come to the devotionals together. Attending the devotionals each week has provided the perfect opportunity for us to maintain our friendship and to be spiritually edified together. Brother Kooyman, I hope we enjoy this week's talk as much as the previous 250 devotionals we have attended together.

Also, sisters, thank you very much for the music this morning. I love uplifting music and the positive effect it can have on our spirits. Good music helps us respond to the Savior's invitation to come. That is the focus of my remarks today.

Before I move directly into my remarks, may I extend to you an invitation? Focus on the promptings from the Holy Ghost during our time together this morning. Listen for at least one idea that you will apply in your life within the next week. I invite you to do the same thing as you come to the devotionals each Tuesday.

If we leave the devotionals each week with a determination to do something with what we have learned and felt, then we will truly be edified together as a campus community.

In the Old and New Testaments (Exodus 24:1; Isaiah 55:3; Matthew 4:19, 11:28–30; Mark 1:17; John 6:35; John 14:6; Revelation 22:17); in the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 6:4; 2 Nephi 9:41, 45, 51; 2 Nephi 26:33; 2 Nephi 28:32; Jacob 1:7; Omni 1:25–26; Alma 29:2; 3 Nephi 12:3, 20, 23–24; 3 Nephi 18:28–33; 3 Nephi 21:20, 27; Mormon 9:27; Ether 5:5; Moroni 10:30, 32); in the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 10:67; 18:11; 20:59; 45:5, 46; 132:12); and in modern-day hymns ("Come, Follow Me"; "Come unto Jesus"; "Come unto Him") there are clear invitations from Heavenly Father, from Jesus Christ, and from prophets and apostles to come unto the Savior.

My goal today is to direct our attention to the invitation to Come unto Christ through the Ordinances and covenants of the gospel, Ministering to others with a humble attitude of self-Evaluation. I want to use the word *come* to organize my comments today. Each of the four

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letters in the word can serve as a reminder of four important points I would like to make.

Come unto Christ

First, the letter *C* reminds us to come.

Come is a verb of movement. The use of the word in the context we are examining is as an imperative or command. We could consider that this invitation is not merely a suggestion but rather a commandment that we move from where we are to where Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ would like us to be. We are the ones who must make the effort to move.

Of the many invitations in the scriptures to come unto Christ, I would like to draw attention to two. Think about the need for movement as we read these verses. First, in Matthew we read an invitation from the Savior Himself:

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.
[Matthew 11:28–30]

Something that I notice when I read the invitations to come unto Christ is that there is usually the invitation followed by a promise. Read these verses again and notice the invitations followed by the promises. To help us visually, I have noted the invitations with underlined text and the promises with bold text.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: ***and ye shall find rest unto your souls.***

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

We see a similar pattern in the invitation extended by Moroni at the conclusion of the Book of Mormon:

Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God. [Moroni 10:32]

If we are to move closer to the Savior Jesus Christ and respond to these invitations, we must yield our whole hearts to Heavenly Father. In this way He will know of our sincere desire to become one with Him and His Son. These are clear invitations followed by clear promises. We are to come unto Christ. It is an invitation extended with promises.

I love singing the hymn “Come unto Jesus.” The fourth verse is particularly meaningful to me:

*Come unto Jesus from ev’ry nation,
From ev’ry land and isle of the sea.
Unto the high and lowly in station,
Ever he calls, “Come to me, to me.”*
[“Come unto Jesus,” *Hymns*, 1985, no. 117]

I have the opportunity every day to interact with colleagues, international graduate students in our department, and students enrolled at the English Language Center “from ev’ry land and isle of the sea.” These colleagues and students remind me of the Savior’s love for all of our Heavenly Father’s children and of His desire that we respond to the invitation to come, no matter where we live.

Remember the *C* in the word *come* and come unto Christ.

The Ordinances and Covenants of the Gospel

The second letter in the word *come* can remind us of the ordinances of the gospel: *Come unto Christ through the ordinances and covenants of the gospel.*

From *True to the Faith* we read:

In the Church, an ordinance is a sacred, formal act performed by the authority of the priesthood. Some ordinances are essential to our exaltation. These ordinances are called saving ordinances. They include baptism, confirmation, ordination to the Melchizedek Priesthood (for men), the temple endowment, and the marriage sealing. With each of these ordinances, we enter into solemn covenants with the Lord. . . .

Ordinances and covenants help us remember who we are. They remind us of our duty to God. The Lord has provided them to help us come unto Him and receive eternal life. When we honor them, He strengthens us. [True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 109, 110; emphasis added]

Notice the link between ordinances and covenants. When we enter into an ordinance of the gospel, we also make covenants with our Heavenly Father. I would like to review briefly with you two kinds of ordinances that we participate in that help us to respond to the Savior's invitation to come: the ordinance of the sacrament and temple ordinances.

The Ordinance of the Sacrament

We are reminded every Sabbath day about the covenants that we have made at baptism by participating in the ordinance of the sacrament. As you sit in sacrament meeting and listen to the sacramental prayers, do you listen with your ears or with your heart? I appreciate so very much the blessing of reciting the sacrament prayers in my mind as I listen to the appointed priesthood holders bless the bread and the water.

The sacrament reminds me not just of the covenants I made at baptism but also of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. The Atonement of Christ truly qualifies Him to invite you and me to follow Him into the presence of our Heavenly Father. Recall the invitation from Christ to come unto Him that we read in Matthew. We are all "heavy laden." We each have cares, concerns, and sins that cause us to be heavy laden. It is through our repentance that we can receive rest. It is through our continued obedience to the commandments that we can receive rest. It is through the atoning sacrifice of the Savior that it is possible for Him to make a promise of rest.

As we desire to respond to the Savior's invitation to come, we will have to leave behind our weaknesses and our sins. The cleansing power of repentance allows us to experience the peace that Christ promised. Each week we can partake of the sacrament and feel the cleansing power of the Atonement in our lives.

In his general conference talk in October 1989, Elder David B. Haight taught:

*Our most valuable worship experience in the sacrament meeting is the sacred ordinance of the sacrament, for it provides the opportunity to focus our minds and hearts upon the Savior and His sacrifice. ["The Sacrament—and the Sacrifice," *Ensign*, November 1989, 61]*

Next Sunday I invite you to listen to the sacramental prayers with new ears and with your heart. By worthily partaking of the sacrament you are responding to the Savior's invitation to come.

Temple Ordinances

Temple ordinances are the second of the ordinances that I wish to remind us of this morning. Everything that we do in the Church should point us as individuals and as families to temple ordinances. All of the ordinances of

the restored gospel of Jesus Christ invite us to improve our lives and to come to the Savior. Temple ordinances require that we be prepared to make sacred covenants with our Heavenly Father.

The ordinances of the endowment and the sealing of husband and wife are sacred temple ordinances. A simple definition of the word *endowment* is “gift.” In the Merriam-Webster online dictionary we see that the word also means “natural capacity, power, or ability” (<http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/endowment>). As we participate in the ordinances of the temple, we receive a gift from our Heavenly Father. We also learn about our natural capacities. We receive power—and Heavenly Father increases our abilities. We are reminded of the role of Jesus Christ in our lives. We are reminded that through His atoning sacrifice we can cleanse and purify ourselves and prepare ourselves to enter back into His presence.

Our family had the opportunity this past week to enter the Salt Lake Temple with our youngest son and his fiancée for their marriage and sealing. What a blessing to witness such a powerful ordinance with powerful blessings.

After we have participated in temple ordinances and made these sacred covenants for ourselves, we have the opportunity of returning to the temple again to perform these same sacred ordinances for deceased family members. We can assist our family members who did not have the opportunity of participating themselves to receive the promised blessings of these ordinances and extend to them the invitation to come unto Christ.

I challenge each of you to obtain a temple recommend and then remain worthy to use it. Go to the temple often. Think about how the ordinances you have participated in draw you closer to Jesus Christ. Think about how you are responding to the invitation to come unto Christ.

Ministering to Others

Third, the letter *M*: *Come unto Christ through the ordinances and covenants of the gospel, ministering to others.*

As we minister to others, we provide service. It is through true service to others that we demonstrate to Heavenly Father the purity of our hearts.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught in the 1986 October general conference:

To follow in the footsteps of the only perfect person who ever lived, we must expect to stretch our souls. . . .

*. . . Examples improve society more than sermons. Most people would rather see a sermon than hear one. [“Brother’s Keeper,” *Ensign*, November 1986, 20, 23]*

Service that stretches our souls is the most meaningful. My father clearly taught me the importance of soul-stretching service—of living a sermon. I grew up in Perry, Utah. The stake in which I grew up had a dairy farm and fruit orchards that provided regular opportunities for service. On one occasion it was time to harvest the hay, and our ward was assigned a particular day to work. My dad was always one of the first to volunteer for these priesthood assignments. I recall him reminding me one evening that the next day was our assignment and that we needed to be at the Church farm at 5 p.m. We arrived a few minutes before five. Additional brethren and young men arrived, and we worked together to bring in the hay.

I remember that we had been working for an hour or so when some of the brethren began to leave. Some who had arrived after we had were already leaving. I looked at my dad and suggested that we could go as well. He smiled and said it didn’t matter what the others were doing. We had agreed to serve for the entire time of the assignment, and there was still work to be done. The response was kind

and clear; I had better stop watching others and stay focused on my opportunity to serve as I had agreed to do. That example of soul-stretching service has helped me so many times in my life.

I appreciate the challenge that Sister Bonnie D. Parkin gave us at the devotional on February 13 of this year. She asked us to find our personal ministries and to serve others around us. She said:

Personal ministry can answer prayers. We can offer a daily prayer that enlists the help of the Lord Jesus Christ as we ask: "Help me to be the answer to someone's prayer today." The Lord consistently answers this prayer as we tune our eyes and ears to discerning the needs of those around us. . . .

As you leave the Marriott Center today, you will have immediate opportunities to practice your personal ministry. Please, never suppress a generous thought. ["Personal Ministry: Sacred and Precious," BYU devotional, 13 February 2007]

For those of you who attended that devotional, how many have asked in your prayers to be the answer to someone else's prayers? Let us be living sermons of service.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland challenged us to come unto the Savior through service to others. He stated:

The people around us need a lot of help, and I think the Lord expects us to join in that effort. I think that is what he meant when he said, "Come; see what I do and watch how I spend my time." . . .

On the example of the Savior himself and his call to his apostles, and with the need for peace and comfort ringing in our ears, I ask you to be a healer, be a helper, be someone who joins in the work of Christ in lifting burdens, in making the load lighter, in making things better. . . . Someone sitting within reasonable proximity to you tonight is carrying a spiritual or physical or emotional burden of some sort or some other affliction drawn from life's catalog of a thousand kinds of sorrow. In the spirit of

Christ's first invitation to Philip and Andrew and then to Peter and the whole of his twelve apostles, jump into this work. Help people. Heal old wounds and try to make things better. ["Come unto Me," fireside address given at BYU, 2 March 1997; emphasis added]

Through soul-stretching service to others we respond to the Savior's invitation to come.

Self-Evaluation

Finally, let us use the last letter in the word *come* to remind us to be engaged in self-evaluation. *Come unto Christ through the ordinances and covenants of the gospel, ministering to others with a humble attitude of self-evaluation.*

Over the years I have learned that evaluations we make of our own performance can fall on a continuum, with Superficial Self-Evaluation on one end, Critical but Healthy Self-Evaluation in the middle, and Hypercritical Self-Evaluation at the other end.

Let's start with Superficial Self-Evaluation at the left end of the continuum. This type of evaluation lacks the depth of reflective thought. We skim over our weaknesses and view our strengths as better than they perhaps are. Without much thought we declare ourselves in good spiritual condition and worthy of more blessings from Heavenly Father.

On the right end of this continuum would be Hypercritical Self-Evaluation. At this end of the continuum would be those who find fault with every aspect of their lives. These individuals pick apart their good lives and service in the kingdom. They believe that there is very little good in what they have accomplished or in the service they have rendered.

Our goal should be to engage in self-evaluation and reflection that is in the middle of this continuum: Critical but Healthy Self-Evaluation. When we engage in critical but healthy self-evaluation we can be honest with ourselves. We can clearly see our strengths and our weaknesses. We know what we can do to

improve our weaknesses. We recognize that through the atoning sacrifice of our Savior we do not have to be perfect today, and we can know what things we must do to strengthen ourselves.

I have found that three times in particular provide perfect settings for deep, personal self-evaluation and reflection: during daily, personal scripture study; while partaking of the sacrament each week in sacrament meeting; and when we are in the temple.

One of the first ways to receive insights from Heavenly Father as we engage in deep self-evaluation is through our individual study of the scriptures. Daily scripture study is one of the best ways I know of to become aware of my strengths and weaknesses. We must each find the time and place that is best for us to meaningfully study the scriptures. I have found that for me the best time is in the early hours of the morning. I love arising early and spending time in the scriptures and in prayer before turning my attention to other activities for the day.

In a recent fireside for young adults, Elder David A. Bednar taught us a pattern for effective scripture study:

You and I must look to and come unto Christ, who is “the fountain of living waters” . . . , by reading . . . , studying . . . , searching . . . , and feasting . . . upon the words of Christ as contained in the holy scriptures. . . .

. . . The central and recurring theme of the Book of Mormon is the invitation for all to “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him.” . . . The teachings, warnings, admonitions, and episodes in this remarkable book of scripture all focus upon and testify of Jesus the Christ as the Redeemer and our Savior. [“A Reservoir of Living Water,” fireside address given at BYU, 4 February 2007; emphasis added]

As I have read the Book of Mormon multiple times, I continue to find the questions asked

in the book of Alma to be the most meaningful self-evaluation questions:

And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?

Do ye exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you? Do you look forward with an eye of faith, and view this mortal body raised in immortality, and this corruption raised in incorruption, to stand before God to be judged according to the deeds which have been done in the mortal body?

I say unto you, can you imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord, saying unto you, in that day: Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth? . . .

And now I, Alma, do command you in the language of him who hath commanded me, that ye observe to do the words which I have spoken unto you.

I speak by way of command unto you that belong to the church; and unto those who do not belong to the church I speak by way of invitation, saying: Come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye also may be partakers of the fruit of the tree of life. [Alma 5:14–16, 61–62; emphasis added]

I challenge you to reread the entire fifth chapter of Alma. This chapter provides excellent self-evaluation questions that we can ask ourselves.

During the quietness of the sacrament is a second time when we can engage in deep self-evaluation. Heavenly Father will bring to our minds the things that we have done that require that we make improvements. He will also bring to our minds the peace that will confirm that we are making progress.

Finally, as we regularly enter the temple we can use the perfectness of that quiet environment to reflect and pray. Within the walls of the temple Heavenly Father has provided many answers to my concerns.

During a recent visit to the temple I whispered to my wife that I could sit in the celestial room forever.

She smiled and said, "But we'd better be about our work."

The quietness of the temple can provide a refuge from the cares and concerns of the world. We leave there better prepared to move back into the world and to be instruments in our Heavenly Father's hands in serving those around us.

Conclusion

As I conclude this morning, let me remind you of the challenge I gave at the beginning. My desire is that you will depart from the devotional today with at least one idea that you can apply in your lives to become a better Latter-day Saint. I also hope that you can use the word *come* to remember the Savior's invitation.

Let me close with a scripture that helps me more fully understand this invitation to come. This invitation is accompanied with perhaps the greatest blessing of all:

Verily, thus saith the Lord: It shall come to pass that every soul who forsaketh his sins and cometh unto me, and calleth on my name, and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face and know that I am. [D&C 93:1; emphasis added]

What greater promise could we receive? This is the blessing that I seek, and I invite you to seek the same blessing.

I testify that Christ wants each of us to respond to His invitation to come. May we *come unto Christ through the ordinances and covenants of the gospel, ministering to others with a humble attitude of self-evaluation.* In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.