

# Gospel Gifts

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After recovering from the shock of being invited early last November to speak at today's devotional, my mind turned to finding a topic on which to speak. The invitation was to address a gospel topic of importance to me. The idea of gospel gifts came quickly to mind. We were entering the holiday season, a season of gratitude for gifts and blessings received as well as a season for the giving of gifts. A bit more thought reminded me that I would be speaking one day before my youngest daughter's 15th birthday and, as we know, birthdays are also occasions for gift giving.

Subsequent pondering and prayer confirmed that my initial impression to speak about gospel gifts was appropriate. The idea of gifts permeates the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the most recent general conference of the Church, 11 of the 34 talks included the word *gift* or *gifts*. Additionally, 129 chapters or sections of the standard works make reference to gifts.

## Gospel Gifts Typify Jesus Christ

So what do I mean by gospel gifts? As the Bible Dictionary in the LDS edition of the scriptures tells us, "The word *gospel* means good news. The good news is that Jesus Christ has made a perfect atonement for mankind"

(s.v. "gospels," 682). While preparing this talk, I read the following verse during my regular scripture study:

*Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given; and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him.*  
[2 Nephi 11:4]

The phrase *gospel gifts* came to me weeks before I read this passage, but only upon reading it did I understand more fully. Gospel gifts are gifts that point us to or typify Jesus Christ.

## Gospel Gifts May Be Given to Us By God

One of the scriptural references to gifts is found in Matthew 7:9–11, which reads:

*Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?  
Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?*

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*If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?*

In these verses, the Savior teaches us that even we imperfect mortals know how to give good gifts. That being the case, it ought to cause no wonderment in us that, in their perfection, Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ also give good, even perfect, gifts. However, the 129 scriptural passages I referred to either address gifts in general or they do not make clear what specific gift is being given.

Gifts are given—indeed, the dictionary suggests that the word *gift* is akin to the Old English *giefan*, which means “to give.” Therefore, I searched for the word *give* and its variants in the online version of the scriptures. My point in searching was to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the specific gifts actually given by God to some or to all of His children. I quit compiling my list somewhat over two-thirds of the way through the more than 700 scriptural references that came up in my search results. Here is the list I compiled:

- land
- the dews of heaven or rain
- bounties of the earth
- food
- clothing
- peace
- mercy
- favor in the sight of others
- light
- law or commandments
- scriptures
- rest
- others to help His servants
- an inheritance for sons and daughters
- a charge to His prophets in the sight of the congregation
- victory over enemies

- children
- sorrow of mind when disobedient
- strength
- wisdom and knowledge
- honor
- a heart to do the commandments
- reviving in our bondage
- the desires of our hearts
- grace and glory
- doctrine
- the bread of adversity
- the water of affliction
- weakness
- an everlasting name
- pastors
- a heart to know God
- an expected end
- beauty for ashes
- the oil of joy for mourning
- the garment of praise for spiritual heaviness

In the cases of some of the items on the list, it was easy to see how the gift typifies the Savior. Take light, for instance. John 8:12 states, “Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” But what of some of the other items on the list? How does weakness typify the Savior?

The Lord Himself told Moroni, “I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me” (Ether 12:27). If, because of humility induced by the weaknesses given to us by God, we “becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble,” we will also “becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord” (Mosiah 3:19). The Apostle Paul, after beseeching the Lord three times that his “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7) might be removed, received in response this comforting reply: “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” After recounting this reply in his Second Epistle to

the Corinthian Saints, Paul wrote these words: “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:9). I feel certain that, in this sense, to glory in one’s infirmities is to give thanks to God that He has blessed us with help to curb the pride that so easily distances the natural man or woman from the saving grace of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

### **Gospel Gifts May Be Given to Us By Others**

Though I have thus far concentrated on gifts given to us by Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, I do not mean to suggest that such gifts constitute the sum total of gospel gifts. I firmly believe that some of the good but imperfect gifts that we give to each other are also gospel gifts and, as such, will typify Jesus Christ. I offer examples of three gospel gifts that I have received, though I could offer many more.

The Burley Theatre in Burley, Idaho, is a single-screen theater. While I was a young child and preteen, Clayton Bryan, “Mr. Bryan” to us kids, was the manager, and he appeared a somewhat fearsome man. It seemed to my young mind that he would just as soon kick you out of the theater as look at you—at least if you were misbehaving. As a 16-year-old, I got a job as a projectionist at the Burley Theatre. Through working for him, I learned that Mr. Bryan was not the fearsome man of my childhood.

The Harris Theatre, another single-screen movie theater about a block and a half from the Burley Theatre, was owned by the same man and was managed by Mr. Bryan’s wife, Kathryn. Given the proximity of the two theaters to each other and the half-hour difference in starting times of the movies shown at each, it was possible for me to be the projectionist at both of them. After starting the movie at the Burley Theatre and taking a few minutes to make sure all was running well, I would walk to the Harris Theatre and start the movie there.

The days of the dual-projector booth that allowed movies to be shown by alternating the reels between the projectors were over. The Burley Theatre had implemented a platter-projection system. All reels of the movie were spliced together and wound around a removable metal spool in the center of a platter. To play the movie, the metal spool would be removed and placed on an empty platter. The film would be pulled from the center of the full platter, threaded through the control mechanism of the platter, which was called the payout unit, then over a series of rollers to the projector, through the projector and sound head, and finally over another series of rollers to the empty platter, where it would be secured to the metal spool, around which it would be wound to be ready for the next showing of the movie.

As the movie played, the payout unit controlled the rotation speed of the platter system to ensure that as the movie was pulled off of the full platter and wound onto the empty platter, it maintained an even tension, thereby preventing the film from breaking. To keep centrifugal force from spinning the end of the film off the full platter at the outer edge, a suction cup attached to a small metal plate was affixed to the full platter to hold the end of the film in place.

One night I started the movie at the Burley and then, as usual, went to the Harris to start the movie there. When I got back to the projection booth at the Burley, I was horrified to see that I had failed to securely fix the suction cup to the full platter. As a result, the cup, its attached plate, and the loose film end had been spun off the platter. While I had been away, close to a reel of film had been pulled off the platter and tied in a huge knot.

With scissors I cut the film closest to the edge of the full platter, stopped the platter long enough to really secure the suction cup, and then set to work fixing the mess. Quickly abandoning my attempt to untie the knot,

I made several dozen cuts in the film until I had flat lengths of film to work with. Then I began matching up ends and splicing them back together until I finally had a single complete length. With Mr. Bryan's help, I was able to splice this repaired section to the film still on the platter and then let it wind back on, all without stopping the movie. To this day I don't remember how we managed that feat.

Even though I had learned that he was really a kind man, the fearsome Mr. Bryan of my childhood was in my mind as I repaired the film. For my carelessness, I expected a tongue lashing at the very least. But instead of condemning me, he calmly and frankly forgave me while also admonishing me to learn from the mistake and to be certain that it didn't happen again. That night Clayton Bryan gave me the gospel gift of compassion.

In 1981, as a 19-year-old missionary in the Florida Tallahassee Mission, my first transfer sent me to serve in the Macclenny Ward in Baker County to the west of Jacksonville. The area had been closed for a period of time before my companion and I were assigned to reopen it. For several days while we looked for suitable lodgings, we were houseguests of Bishop Kenneth Alligood and his family.

As a lover of books, I have been wont to peruse the bookshelves of almost any home or office I am in when it would not be impolite to do so. On the Alligoods' bookshelves I found one paperback and five hardback volumes from the Harper and Row Basic Reading Program, the very books used when I attended the Dworshak Elementary School from first to sixth grades. Seeing the volumes brought back fond memories of school and especially of my first-grader pleasure in taking each of the paperback volumes home after the class had completed it and excitedly reading each to my parents. My excitement and pleasure came because mine was a reading family, and now I too had become a reader.

I must have commented to the Alligoods about the volumes and of my fond memories of them and what they represented to me. Sister Alligood explained that she had acquired them after she learned that the local school district intended to discard them. After slightly more than three months' service in Macclenny, older sister missionaries were to replace my companion and me. The Alligoods, like most Florida Saints, enjoyed both having the missionaries in their home and feeding them well. We dined with them shortly before being transferred from Macclenny. While we were at their home, Sister Alligood pulled the Harper and Row Basic Reading volumes off her bookshelf and gave them to me as a parting gift. Whether her action was impulsive or not, I do not know. I demurred, but she insisted, and I have the books to this day. They now bring back good memories not only of my elementary school days but also of the day and the manner of my receiving them. That evening, along with the books, Sister Alligood gave me the gospel gift of unselfishness—of placing the happiness of another above one's own desires.

On the afternoon of June 20, 2005, two vertebrae in my neck were fractured in an automobile accident. I wore a rigid cervical collar continuously for more than three months after the accident and was under doctor's orders not to lift much of anything or to do anything else that was likely to strain my neck or to cause me to lean forward or backward. Truthfully, I didn't feel like doing much of anything for the first four to six weeks after the accident, least of all mowing the lawn, which has never been a favorite activity of mine. But, had I felt like mowing the lawn, the doctor's orders would have prohibited it.

After hearing of my accident, a family in our ward volunteered to mow our lawn for as long as I would not be able to mow it myself. We were grateful for their offer, and we told them that we would gladly pay them to mow the lawn. They refused the payment and were as

good as their offer. The father, one of the sons, or sometimes two of them together faithfully mowed our lawn every week until I could once again mow it myself. This family had taken to heart King Benjamin's teaching that "when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17). Throughout those summer months they gave me the gospel gift of vicarious sacrifice—doing for someone else what that person cannot do for him- or herself.

### **Gospel Gifts May Be Given but Not Received**

I might, because of pride or some other misguided notion, have chosen to refuse these gifts. That would not have negated the giving of the gifts. Giving and receiving are two separate actions reposing in two different individuals. This is clearly taught in D&C 88:33:

*For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift? Behold, he rejoices not in that which is given unto him, neither rejoices in him who is the giver of the gift.*

Have you ever experienced the pang of sorrow that comes from having tried to give a thoughtful gift that was received with indifference or insincerity? I have. Unfortunately, I am also guilty of having caused such sorrow through my failure to truly receive gifts thoughtfully given to me.

In the colder months, I enjoy wearing sweaters. When my wife, Bonnie, and I married, I owned a maroon sweater one of my brothers-in-law had given me some years earlier. I had worn the sweater a great deal, and the fabric had noticeably thinned at the elbows.

My wife is talented with a crochet hook and makes beautiful things with that tool. Bonnie had crocheted herself several sweaters beginning when she was in 4-H as a girl. She decided, either because she couldn't find a ready-made one or because she couldn't find

one that was within our Christmas gift budget, that she would crochet one to replace my beloved but worn sweater.

Her intent was both to please and to surprise. On Christmas morning, however, it became apparent—as it had not been while she crocheted it—that the sweater was too bulky. It was not only apparent to Bonnie; I knew it as well, and it showed on my face. While Bonnie would no doubt tell you that she was sorry about the sweater's bulkiness, I know that her sorrow was compounded by my selfish first thought about how I would look wearing it rather than by thinking first about the love that had gone into it. I had not truly received her gift. Gratefully, I have since received her forgiveness.

### **Gospel Gifts Received Are Gospel Gifts Kept**

In general, when we truly receive a gift, we keep it. The printout of the entries listed under the verb *keep* contained in the online version of the *Oxford English Dictionary* runs to 35 pages and encompasses 58 separate but related definitions. The sense in which we keep gifts is captured by definition 29, which reads, "Actively to hold in possession; to retain in one's power or control; to continue to have, hold, or possess" (<http://dictionary.oed.com>, s.v. "keep, v").

I graduated from Burley High School 30 years ago this year. I still regularly use some of the tangible gifts I was given for graduation. The money clip in my pocket is one example. My manicure set is another. The travel toiletries bag I received served me well for many years, but my repeated use wore it out. A newer edition replaced the college dictionary that had clearly, after 29 years, been superseded. Even today, I remember the individuals who gave me these gifts and think of them when using the gifts. I truly kept all of these things in the dictionary sense of *keep* quoted previously.

However, some gospel gifts are intangible and cannot be kept in quite the same way. The

gift of compassion and admonishment to learn from my mistakes given to me by Mr. Bryan was one such gift. Elaine Temkin, the woman under whose tutelage I served as a student teacher, gave me another such gift. When conversing with me one day about some interactions I had observed at the school where she taught, Elaine matter-of-factly said, “Jeff, mediocrity resents excellence.” The phrase stuck in my mind. Sometimes, after doing my best and excelling to one degree or another, I have been the object of resentment. At other times, when I have witnessed excellence in others and have been reproached by my conscience for doing less than I could and ought to have done, I have done the resenting. In both situations, the Spirit has brought Elaine’s phrase to my remembrance and helped to temper either the pride that may have been present in the first situation or the sense of self-pity that may have been present in the second.

As mentioned earlier, God gives us the gift of commandments. These are intangible gifts. How do we “keep” them? The phrase *keep the commandments* is found in more than 125 chapters or sections of the standard works—often in multiple verses within those chapters. Throughout most of my life, I have considered the word *keep* in *keep the commandments* as synonymous with *obey*, and I still do. However, it has come to have the additional meaning of *keep* of which I have been speaking.

So how do we keep the commandments in that sense? I believe that our keeping of these intangible gifts will be like that of Mary when she “kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). Abinadi chastised the iniquitous priests of King Noah with these words: “And now I read unto you the remainder of the commandments of God, for I perceive that they are not written in your hearts” (Mosiah 13:11). When we obey the commandments, we write, and thereby keep, them in our hearts. Just as we remember those who have given us gifts—whether tangible

or intangible—we are more likely to “always remember [Jesus Christ] and keep his commandments which he has given [us]” (D&C 20:77) as we obey the commandments.

As was made explicitly clear in John 14:15, which says, “If ye love me, keep my commandments,” as we keep the commandments, we demonstrate our love for Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father. We also witness our desire to make Their will our own. In truly keeping the commandments, we are promised the proximate blessing of “always hav[ing] his Spirit to be with [us]” (D&C 20:77) and, after enduring to the end, the ultimate blessing of “eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God” (D&C 14:7).

#### **Gospel Gifts Truly Received Prompt Thanks—Another Gospel Gift**

Just as we keep the gifts that we truly receive, we must do what the good manners that our mothers taught us insist upon. That is, we must offer thanks to the givers of gospel gifts, whether they be our fellow mortals or our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. Indeed, the scriptures contain frequent references to giving thanks to God for the gospel gifts we are given.

D&C 59:7 states, “Thou shalt thank the Lord thy God in all things.” Verse 21 of the same section reads, “And 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.” Sincere expressions of gratitude coupled with willing obedience are what God hopes to and certainly will receive if we give them to Him. Indeed, according to Elder Robert D. Hales, “Our obedience to the laws, ordinances, and commandments is the greatest expression of love and gratitude that we can bestow upon” the Lord (“Gratitude for the Goodness of God,” *Ensign*, May 1992, 63).

The Savior revealed the meaning that our thanks has to Him in the parable of the 10 lepers, found in Luke 17:11–19:

*And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.*

*And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off:*

*And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.*

*And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.*

*And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God,*

*And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan.*

*And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?*

*There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.*

*And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.*

I believe this story illustrates the truth of Elder Hales' statement that "gratitude brings warmth to the giver and the receiver alike" ("Gratitude for the Goodness of God," 65).

Gratitude and thanks themselves qualify as gospel gifts because they also typify Jesus Christ. Elder Hales also pointed out several examples of the Savior offering His thanks to Heavenly Father. When feeding the five thousand, "Jesus took the loaves; and when he had

given thanks, he distributed to the disciples" (John 6:11). Before commanding Lazarus to come forth from the place where his dead body had been laid, "Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me" (John 11:41). On the night of His betrayal, as He instituted the sacrament, Christ gave thanks for both the bread and the wine before giving each to His disciples (see 1 Corinthians 11:23–24; Mark 14:23). When His chosen disciples in the new world had received the Holy Ghost, Jesus said in prayer, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast given the Holy Ghost unto these whom I have chosen" (3 Nephi 19:20).

May we all remember that gospel gifts typify our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; that they may be given to us by God or by our fellow mortals; that the giving and receiving of gospel gifts are two separate actions; that our true receipt of a gospel gift is manifested by keeping the gift; and that giving thanks for our gospel gifts is itself a gospel gift because giving thanks also typifies Jesus Christ.

I close by offering my gratitude for two supernal gospel gifts. The first is the gift of the Holy Ghost. Through this gift I have received the witness that Jesus is the Christ, through whom the second gift, that of the great vicarious, unselfish, and compassionate sacrifice known as the Atonement, was wrought for me and for you. I leave you with this testimony in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.