

“Remember, Remember”

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My brothers and sisters, it is an honor and great privilege to be on campus today and to speak with you. I am glad that my father and Sister Neuenschwander’s parents are also here. It is of great worth to know people who have been faithful to their commitments and covenants well into their eighties and nineties.

During my first year of graduate school, I had an evening class on Slavic culture. On one occasion, after a day of intense study, I was hurrying to class to take an exam. Information, dates, and events were swimming around in my head. The closer I got to the exam, the more confused I became. On the way I happened to see one of my professors and asked him to clarify what for him must have been a very obscure matter. He looked at me and asked in a tone I still remember, “Is it important?”

Over the years I have pondered his question. It has helped me to distinguish the important from the trivial, to remember the important things and to forget the things that have little consequence or that would, by forgetting them, bring a blessing.

Remembering important things is fundamental to both our temporal and spiritual well-being. Confusing what we should remember with what we can or ought to forget creates difficulties for us. Much trouble in life originates

from forgetting what we should remember and remembering what we should forget. One of Nephi’s experiences with Laman and Lemuel is an interesting example of this. Nephi told his brothers that they were “slow to remember the Lord” (1 Nephi 17:45). They had seen an angel, and he had spoken to them. Though no response is recorded, I suppose that Laman and Lemuel could have looked at each other and said, “Oh, yeah, we forgot.”

Remembering the kindness of others while forgetting their offenses is spiritually much healthier than forgetting their kindness and remembering their offenses. We should keep in mind that even the Lord, who is capable of remembering everything, has promised that He will forget our sins if we repent.

It seems to me that living the gospel has as much to do with remembering important things as it does with knowing them in the first place. The word *remember* and its derivatives appear hundreds of times in the scriptures—certainly a lot to remember! This repetitious

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scriptural reminder to remember takes on added significance when we understand that in Hebrew the word *remember* has a much broader meaning than does the English connotation of “keeping something in mind.” In the Hebrew context, “doing” is an essential part of the remembering process. Thus, “to remember” is “to do,” whereas “forgetting” is “failing to do.”

The prophets of various dispensations, cultures, and languages have all been remarkably consistent in teaching what is most important for us to remember—and to do. Among them we are to remember:

1. The Lord and His holy name.
2. His word, as well as His words.
3. His commandments.
4. His marvelous works.
5. The poor.

Just a word about each of these:

First, we are to remember the Lord and His holy name. The Lord established His pre-eminent position through the commandments He gave Moses. “I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:2–3).

The Lord also commanded, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them” (Exodus 20:4–5).

The children of Israel had a hard time remembering these commandments and, because of their forgetfulness, suffered painful consequences. Are we under any less obligation to remember them? As the Lord extended His hand to rescue the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage, so also did He offer His life to rescue us from the bondage of sin and death. This we can never forget.

Declared the Savior, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

King Benjamin added his testimony of this essential doctrine: “I say unto you, that there shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent” (Mosiah 3:17).

In our dispensation the Lord confirmed this doctrine through the Prophet Joseph Smith: “No man shall come unto the Father but by me or by my word” (D&C 132:12).

As the means of salvation for all, Jesus commanded all to revere His holy name: “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain” (Exodus 20:7).

Certainly this has reference to speaking the holy name of the Lord in inappropriate and irreverent circumstances or invoking His name as a means of expressing anger, displeasure, surprise, or simply showing a lack of self-control. In this regard there is likely no other commandment that is so universally broken than this one. It seems that in our time we have forgotten the clear instruction of the Lord: “Wherefore, let all men beware how they take my name in their lips” (D&C 63:61). Speaking His name without authority is taking His name in vain.

Remembering the Lord’s name also has much to do with the manner in which we take His name upon ourselves. King Benjamin taught, “I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ, all you that have entered into the covenant with God that ye should be obedient unto the end of your lives” (Mosiah 5:8). King Benjamin counseled his people to remember not to transgress, “that the name [of Christ] be not blotted out of your hearts” (vs. 11). King Benjamin told them that they “should remember to retain the name written always in your hearts, . . . that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be called, and also, the name by which he shall call you” (vs. 12).

If the people were to forget this simple instruction, the name of Christ would be

blotted out of their hearts and they would be found on the left hand of God.

In 1983 I met Sister Marianna G[ł]ównia during an assignment to visit the Polish Saints with Brother Matthew Ciembronowicz. Sister G[ł]ównia had joined the Church in Poland in 1958 when she was 50 years old. For 25 years she had been virtually isolated from other members of the Church. She was in obvious pain as a result of severe injuries received during the Polish occupation. She moved with great difficulty around her small apartment. She told us that representatives of another church had come to offer support and relief if she would simply renounce her faith. With tears in her eyes, Sister G[ł]ównia said, "Brethren, I have never renounced my faith." A year later she passed away a faithful Latter-day Saint. Sister G[ł]ównia remembered the Lord and to the end of her life revered His holy name, which she had taken upon herself.

Our lives are blessed when we remember the Lord and His holy name.

Second, we are to remember His word.

Word and *covenant* often stand together in the scriptures. The Lord is a man of His word. That which the Lord speaks, He will do. That which the Lord promises by His word, He will fulfill. Only on a basis of absolute trust and confidence can we enter into covenants with Him and know that He can do as He promises. Where would trust be if God extended a covenant to us and then promptly forgot it or did not have sufficient power to honor it? Wrote the Psalmist, "He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations" (Psalm 105:8).

To Nephi, the Lord said, "I will show unto . . . my people, who are of the house of Israel, that I am God, and that I covenanted with Abraham that I would remember his seed forever" (2 Nephi 29:14).

Our individual identity as well as our identity as a people is established by how well we remember our covenants. If we are careless

and in the process forget the covenants and promises of God, we will surely lose our identity as the children of God. The history of the Nephites and the Lamanites is one of forgetting the covenant extended to them as part of the house of Israel. The Book of Mormon is an excellent book of remembrance. Its prophets were continually exhorting the people to remember important things. I suppose they did so because of the people's tendency to forget that which should have been important for them to remember. In Mormon's lament over the destruction of the Nephites, he wrote, "O ye fair ones, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you! Behold, if ye had not done this, ye would not have fallen" (Mormon 6:17-18).

The Nephites forgot their covenant and the promises given to them by virtue of that covenant. They simply forgot what they should have remembered! And in their forgetting they lost their identity in a most tragic manner. The Lamanites, though not destroyed, had also not taken advantage of the covenant and promises given to their fathers. As Mormon lamented the fall of the Nephites, he reminded the Lamanites of important things that had passed from their memory: "Know ye that ye are of the house of Israel. . . . And ye will also know that ye are a remnant of the seed of Jacob; therefore ye are numbered among the people of the first covenant" (Mormon 7:2, 10).

The recovery of the people's identity as members of a covenant family was uppermost in Mormon's mind. Where is that identity to be found? It is in the knowledge of the promises made to their fathers. The Lord revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith:

And for this very purpose are these plates preserved, . . . that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people;

And that the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of their fathers, and that they might know the promises of the Lord. [D&C 3:19-20]

We are no different. If we remember and participate fully in the covenant the Lord has extended to us, we will remember who we are and what we are about. If, on the other hand, we forget the word of the Lord and His covenant, we will lose both our identity and the fulfillment of the promises that otherwise would come to us and to our children—a tragic consequence of forgetting.

Not only should we remember the word of the Lord, but we should remember His words as well. His words are without end (see Moses 1:38). They are sure and shall not fail. They are pure, they are true, they are faithful, they are eternal (see 2 Nephi 31:15). As we remember and ponder His words, we remember and ponder matters of eternal significance and meaning. On one occasion the Lord asked the Twelve if they, like the multitude, would also go away from Him. Their answer is the one that we should all wish to give: “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

We should also remember that the Lord’s words are very practical and are meant to guide us through life’s trials and uncertainties. Jacob wrote, “Behold, my beloved brethren, remember the words of your God” (2 Nephi 9:52). Nephi continued this thought in words that are very familiar to us: “Feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:3).

The Savior counseled us to live “by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). His words point us in “a straight course” (Alma 37:44). They nourish us and give us understanding (see Alma 32:28). The Savior taught:

Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings [or my words], and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like:

He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the

flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock.

But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great. [Luke 6:47–49]

Would that we all remember and not forget the word of the Lord, His covenant and promises, and His words of life.

Third, we are to remember His commandments. In our world, too many look upon the commandments of God as restrictive or punitive. We do not share this opinion. Divine commandments are given to us by a loving Father who desires to bless His children. Obedience to His commandments brings safety and blessings. We often sing:

*Keep the commandments; keep the commandments!
In this there is safety; in this there is peace.
He will send blessings; He will send blessings.
Words of a prophet: Keep the commandments.
In this there is safety and peace.
[“Keep the Commandments,” Hymns, 1985,
no. 303]*

The commandments of God are a view into His personality and reveal His integrity. Is it possible, for example, to imagine that the Lord would expect us to keep His commandments while He himself disregards them? Certainly not. Wilford Woodruff wrote, “Jesus Christ abode in the covenant; he kept all the commandments while he was upon the earth. . . . There was no part of the gospel that Christ did not fulfil” (*The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, sel. G. Homer Durham [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1946], 80).

Even in baptism the Savior showed us the way by His own obedience. In answer to John’s reluctance to baptize Him, Jesus said, “Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15).

Nephi provided this explanation:

And now, I would ask of you, my beloved brethren, wherein the Lamb of God did fulfil all righteousness in being baptized by water? . . . He showeth unto the children of men that, according to the flesh he humbleth himself before the Father, and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments. [2 Nephi 31:6–7]

Many blessings flow from willing obedience to the commandments of God. The fourth commandment teaches us to “remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work” (Exodus 20:8–10).

To those who remember the Sabbath, the Lord has promised “the fulness of the earth” (D&C 59:16). Many can testify to the literal fulfillment of this promise. In the initial years of the spread of the gospel in eastern Europe, the Saints were counseled to attend to their Church responsibilities and leave their garden plots alone on the Sabbath. This was indeed a great matter of faith! They relied upon the harvest of their small gardens to carry them through the winter. They were accustomed to spending weekends in their gardens, which were often located a long distance from where they lived. Obedience to this commandment brought them blessings. Those who were faithful in keeping the Sabbath day holy had fruit when others around them did not. They had moisture when others received none. Their fruit was protected when that of others was lost. These faithful Saints saw the fulfillment of the Lord’s promise to Malachi: “And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field” (Malachi 3:11).

Commandments given in love are to be kept in love. The Savior taught, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

One of the great blessings in keeping the commandments is that our obedience to them not only brings us closer to the Giver of the commandment but permits us to know Him. John taught, “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments” (1 John 2:3). Indeed, it is our willing obedience that confirms our faith. For example, how can we know for sure that God has power to forgive sin? We can know for ourselves when we repent and are baptized for the remission of sins or when we partake of the sacrament worthily and regularly.

Remembering the commandments of God and doing them bring blessings, safety, and great spiritual knowledge. Let us always remember to keep the commandments.

Fourth, we are to remember His marvelous works. One of the most beautiful messages of the Psalmist was his plea to remember the great works of the Lord: “His work is honourable and glorious: and his righteousness endureth for ever. He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered” (Psalm 111:3–4).

As we remember the mighty works of the Lord, we are humbled in the recognition of our relative nothingness and placed in a position to learn great things. Moses found this to be true when he was permitted to view the greatness of God’s creations. As he regained his physical strength, he remarked, “Now, for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed” (Moses 1:10).

Keeping the mighty works of God in our memory builds in us knowledge, confidence, and a profound reverence for His magnificent power. On one occasion we stayed overnight in the Austrian Alps. Our lodging was a small guesthouse on the edge of a deep precipice. Across the divide rose a sheer wall of rock thousands of feet high. Early in the evening a fierce storm arose. As thunder and lightning reverberated against the rock wall, the whole valley seemed to shake. With profound respect for the awesome

power of God, we could not help but compare our puny experience with the account found in 3 Nephi:

There arose a great storm, such an one as never had been known in all the land.

And there was also a great and terrible tempest; and there was terrible thunder, insomuch that it did shake the whole earth as if it was about to divide asunder.

And there were exceedingly sharp lightnings, such as never had been known in all the land.

[3 Nephi 8:5–7]

The mightiest of all His work is, of course, His magnificent Atonement, which brought to pass the immortality and eternal life of you and me. May we always remember His mighty works.

Fifth, we are to remember the poor. The Lord counseled us, “Remember in all things the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted, for he that doeth not these things, the same is not my disciple” (D&C 52:40). One of the distinguishing characteristics of Enoch’s Zion was that “there was no poor among them” (Moses 7:18). Each member of the Church has both a temporal and spiritual responsibility toward the poor. President Marion G. Romney said, “The prime duty of help to the poor by the Church is not to bring temporal relief to their needs, but salvation to their souls. . . . All must be measured by the ultimate spiritual uplift” (CR, October 1977, 118).

Brothers and sisters, let us be neither forgetful nor stingy in our care for the poor and those who stand in need of our sustenance.

As I began writing down the patterns of the “remember” scriptures, I also discovered some “remember, remember” scriptures—six of them, to be exact. Five are in the Book of Mormon and one is in the Doctrine and Covenants. If the “remember” scriptures are important, then the “remember, remember” ones must be doubly important.

These six scriptures in themselves provide an effective review of an already familiar pattern. Helaman told his sons Nephi and Lehi, “O remember, remember, my sons, . . . that there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ” (Helaman 5:9).

Furthermore, he said to them, “And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation” (Helaman 5:12).

To Helaman from his father, Alma: “O remember, remember, my son Helaman, how strict are the commandments of God” (Alma 37:13).

King Benjamin taught, “I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. . . . O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it” (Mosiah 2:41).

Samuel the Lamanite reminded the people, “And now remember, remember, my brethren, that whosoever perisheth, perisheth unto himself” (Helaman 14:30).

Finally, in this dispensation the Lord taught the Prophet, “Remember, remember that it is not the work of God that is frustrated, but the work of men” (D&C 3:3).

In the apostolic charge delivered to Parley P. Pratt, Oliver Cowdery said, “The same thing rehearsed frequently profits us” (HC 2:192). As we all have a tendency to forget, the Lord has provided some gentle reminders to help us remember important things in the gospel. For those who are endowed, frequent visits to the temple remind us of holy covenants and promises. Frequent reading of the scriptures keeps important things in our remembrance. Perhaps the most pervasive reminder of all is the sacrament. All members of the Church can participate weekly in this important ordinance. By so doing we are regularly reminded of our willingness to take His name upon us, to keep

His commandments, and to always remember Him. If we remember and do these things, the Lord promises that His Spirit will be with us, which Spirit brings “all things to [our] remembrance” (John 14:26). The Lord can also jog our memory in some not so gentle ways. Mormon observed, “Except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him” (Helaman 12:3).

May we be wise enough to remember the gentle reminders.

Brethren and sisters, in all of our remembering and forgetting through life, let us remember, and do, at least these five important things:

1. Remember the Lord and His holy name.
2. Remember His word, as well as

His words.

3. Remember His commandments.
4. Remember His marvelous works.
5. Remember the poor.

Now, remember who you are. You are a covenant child of God, who loves you and has prepared a way for you to return to Him. Remember that happiness and peace in this life and in the world to come depend upon remembering the principles I have discussed today. Remember to keep your covenants with the Lord in order to claim His promised blessings. Remember that you are precious and of great worth to Him.

I testify of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the saving power of His holy name. I am a witness of His word, His commandments, and His marvelous works. I testify of our need to care for the poor among us. May we so also remember, and do, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.