

# Making Memories

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This summer I reached one of those time-dictated milestones in my life—the experience of a seventieth birthday. The family thought it was such a special event, they determined to organize a birthday party and invite all of the immediate family to join in. My brother felt it was important enough to drive all the way from Seattle to be with us. Another one drove from Cache Valley. My sisters were already in Salt Lake, and they were the ones, along with my wife, who arranged the celebration.

There in the presence of those who mean the most to me, my family, I had a very enjoyable evening. We all did. Attending were my wife, my children, and all of my grandchildren save one, who is in the mission field, my two sisters, my two brothers and their wives, and nieces and nephews. The evening was filled with stories and events that brought back a flood of memories.

It started out with my sister reminding me how old I was by telling this little account. She said, “Remember when you returned home from your mission and you were invited to a post-mission interview with Levi Edgar Young, one of the Presidents of the First Quorum of the Seventy?”

The number of missionaries in those days was so small that those returning were given an interview by a General Authority. As the interview concluded, I was instructed to go home and tell my stake president that I was to be ordained a seventy. Puffed with pride, I returned home and informed my stake president the instruction I had received. The stake president happened to be my father. He never acted on the instruction—I was never ordained a seventy.

This puzzled me, and I sought out my mother to inquire why my father had never acted on the instruction. My mother gave me some wise counsel. She said, “Don’t worry about it. He is your stake president, and he knows what calling is right for you.” A short time later I was called into the stake Young Men’s presidency, which led to an event where I met a beautiful young lady who soon became my wife. My sister had brought back a very pleasant memory. Then she startled me with

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this statement, “At last you’ve made it to the seventies.”

Finally the time arrived for the time-honored tradition of opening birthday gifts. This is always a frustration for my family. What do you give a dad, at my age, when he already has a drawer full of new, unused socks, white shirts still in plastic wrap, and four racks full of ties? My son came forward and said, “At last I’ve found just the right gift for you,” and he handed me a baseball bat with a white stocking over the end. My first reaction was, “A baseball bat at seventy years of age?”

I pulled off the white stocking, and then I understood why it was a perfect gift. On the end of the bat was imprinted “Adirondack, Willie Mays’ Personal Model” with the actual signature of Willie Mays. This bat was a symbol of many great memories. My mind was flooded with memories of a special birthday that had occurred thirty years earlier. We had just moved from California to New York. We had left our favorite baseball team, the San Francisco Giants, and Willie Mays, who was, of course, their star.

On this special birthday, Willie and the Giants were in New York playing the Mets. My son had saved his money and purchased two tickets as his birthday present to me that year. I came home from work early that day so we’d have time to make the long traffic-filled drive to the Mets’ ballpark for the start of the game. We bought hot dogs, 7UP, and popcorn and settled in our seats to watch Willie Mays beat the Mets. The game was tied at 4 to 4 at the end of nine innings. Willie’s record was four at-bats and zero hits. I said to my son, “We have a long drive home, and I have to get up early to catch the train in to the city for a meeting.” His response was, “Willie won’t be up until next inning. Let’s watch him bat once more.” The same response came after the eleventh, the twelfth, the thirteenth, and the fourteenth innings—and on up to the twenty-third inning. Now it was well after midnight,

and the drive home was well over an hour. Each time I suggested leaving, his response was, “Let’s watch Willie bat one more time.”

Then, in the first of the twenty-third inning, Willie came to bat and drove the ball over the center-field fence. Of course we finished watching the last of the twenty-third inning to be certain the Giants would win 5 to 4. We arrived home at 2:30 a.m. I wasn’t at my best in the meetings the following day, but I had a lasting memory to cherish. Now a piece of wood, a baseball bat, stands in the corner of my office to remind me of a special father-son relationship filled with so many great memories.

I remember taking a little child from his mother’s arms and carrying him to the front of a congregation of Saints, there giving him a name and a father’s blessing. How grateful I was to be worthy of the priesthood keys that qualified me for such a special privilege. I remember how important it was on his eighth birthday when I could take him into the waters of baptism and then bring him out, again exercising the keys of the priesthood, confirming him a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Four years later came another memory, for then I was serving as a member of a bishopric, and I was empowered with my priesthood keys to place my hands on his head and confer upon him the Aaronic Priesthood and ordain him to the office of a deacon in that priesthood.

So it went, on through the priesthood offices of teacher and priest. He reached the great age of nineteen, and now I found myself holding the office of a stake president. I was able to assign myself to confer the Melchizedek Priesthood upon my son and ordain him to the office of elder. Then came the thrill of setting him apart as a full-time missionary and sending him off to Japan to serve the Lord.

Shortly after he returned from a successful mission, I was called to be a General Authority. With that call came the sealing power, which was conferred on me. A few years later my son

and a beautiful young lady knelt before me in the holy temple, and I sealed them together as husband and wife for time and for all eternity.

It doesn't even stop there. The two of them were soon on their way east to New Haven, Connecticut, to attend school. One night I received a telephone call from my son. He said, "Dad, how fast can you make it to New Haven?" I asked what the problem was. He said, "No problem. I'm being called into the bishopric on Sunday, and I want you to ordain me to the office of high priest." So I took off on the next flight to New Haven to make another unique memory.

Even after that it wasn't over. A few years later I returned from a stake conference assignment and received another telephone call. My son said to me, "Elder Ashton has just called me to be a stake president. He knows our history. He said he would not dare put his hands on my head to set me apart to the new office. Can you drive to Provo and set me apart?" What great memories of a father-son relationship this piece of wood holds for me!

I learned something else about memories on a recent trip to the Netherlands. The mission president's wife, in one of our gatherings, was telling about her instructions to the missionaries in which she used two statements: "I wish I had" and "I'm glad I did." So this evening I come to you with a question about eternal memories you are building in your lives. Are they followed by the comment "I wish I had," or can you say, "I'm glad I did"?

One of the best examples I can think of in the scriptures of one who "wished he had" is Alma. After his conversion he went forth in the work with mighty vigor and vitality, with courage and determination to accomplish that which he had been called to do. The Lord gave him another chance to be able to say, "I'm glad I did."

Before Alma's miraculous conversion, however, Alma the Elder had deep concerns. He was the spiritual leader of the Nephites,

and he was aware that many of the young people did not believe in God. They would not be baptized and would not join the Church.

Even worse was the fact that the faithful members of the Church were being mocked and scorned by the unbelievers—these unbelievers being led by his own son, Alma. He was doing all he could to destroy the Church.

Alma the Younger was one of the most vile of all sinners. He was a wicked and idolatrous man and was a great hinderment to the work of God. When the people listened to his flattering but untrue words, their faith in the Lord faltered and Satan began to have power over them. Slowly they were being led away from the truth. In spite of Alma the Younger's wickedness, his father loved him and never gave up hope that his son would repent and live a better life. He longed to see his son happy and faithful in the Church. Together with many of the other faithful people, he prayed with much faith that somehow his son would be brought to the knowledge of the truth.

Young Alma had four friends who were the sons of King Mosiah. They, too, were wicked. They joined Alma in traveling throughout the land, seeking to tear down the Church. One day while they were engaged in their evil pursuits, an angel of the Lord appeared unto them. When the angel spoke, his voice sounded like thunder and caused the earth where the young men stood to shake violently. Alma and his friends were so frightened that they fell to the ground. The angel commanded, "Alma, arise and stand forth, for why persecutest thou the church of God?" (Mosiah 27:13).

Obediently Alma stood and listened to the angel. He was told that his father had prayed for him. The angel explained that he had been sent in answer to the faithful prayers of Alma's father. The angel had come to convince young Alma of the power of God, and as he spoke the earth shook. He asked Alma:

*And now behold, can ye dispute the power of God? For behold, doth not my voice shake the earth? And can ye not also behold me before you? And I am sent from God.*

*Now I say unto thee: . . . go thy way, and seek to destroy the church no more, that their prayers may be answered, and this even if thou wilt of thyself be cast off. [Mosiah 27:15–16]*

With these words the angel departed. Alma and his friends were so astonished that they again fell to the earth. With their own eyes they had seen an angel of the Lord. They had heard his voice and had felt the ground tremble when he spoke. They knew that only the power of God could cause the earth to shake so violently.

Alma the Younger was so overcome by the things he had seen and heard that he was left powerless for several days. He could not speak or even move his arms or legs. When his friends saw how helpless he was, they carried him home and laid him before his father. Alma the Elder was overjoyed when he heard what had happened to his son. He knew his prayers were being answered and that the Lord was helping his son know the truth. He was so happy he invited a multitude of people to come and see the result of the prayers they had offered.

Then Alma the Elder asked the members of the priesthood to fast and pray that the Lord would open the mouth of Alma the Younger so that he might speak, and also that his arms and legs would receive their strength. For two days and two nights they fasted and prayed. During this time Alma the Younger lay motionless. He was going through the difficult process of repentance. He was being tormented by his sins, remembering how he had rebelled against God. He realized that he had led many people to do evil. The very thought of his coming into God's presence racked Alma's soul with horror. He thought, "Oh, . . . that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence

of my God, to be judged of my deeds" (Alma 36:15).

Admitting all of his sins was an agonizing and painful experience. He was deeply sorrowful and ashamed. In the midst of all this despair, young Alma remembered his father had said that Christ would come to the world and suffer for the sins of all mankind. For the first time in his life, Alma the Younger pleaded for forgiveness, crying, "O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me" (Alma 36:18). At last Alma's suffering was replaced by a feeling of exquisite joy when he realized he had been forgiven. He knew that the Savior loved him, and an overwhelming love for the Lord filled his whole soul. He had been taught a powerful testimony of the truth.

Young Alma arose from his bed and began to speak to the people. It must have been a special thrill for his father to hear him say, "I have repented of my sins, and have been redeemed of the Lord; behold I am born of the Spirit" (Mosiah 27:24). He bore testimony to the people, saying that although he had once rejected Jesus, he now knew that Jesus was the Son of God and the Redeemer of the World.

Alma the Younger and the sons of Mosiah changed their lives. Instead of trying to destroy the Church, they traveled throughout all the land trying to correct the wrongs they had done. Then the scriptures record:

*And now it came to pass that Alma began from this time forward to teach the people, and those who were with Alma at the time the angel appeared unto them, traveling round about through all the land, publishing to all the people the things which they had heard and seen, and preaching the word of God in much tribulation, being greatly persecuted by those who were unbelievers, being smitten by many of them.*

*But notwithstanding all this, they did impart much consolation to the church, confirming their faith, and exhorting them with long-suffering and much travail to keep the commandments of God.*

*And four of them were the sons of Mosiah; and their names were Ammon, and Aaron, and Omner, and Himni; these were the names of the sons of Mosiah.*

*And they traveled throughout all the land of Zarahemla, and among all the people who were under the reign of king Mosiah, zealously striving to repair all the injuries which they had done to the church, confessing all their sins, and publishing all the things which they had seen, and explaining the prophecies and the scriptures to all who desired to hear them.*

*And thus they were instruments in the hands of God in bringing many to the knowledge of the truth, yea, to the knowledge of their Redeemer.*

*And how blessed are they! For they did publish peace; they did publish good tidings of good; and they did declare unto the people that the Lord reigneth. [Mosiah 27:32–37]*

From this time forward we find Alma going forth and preaching with much boldness, having the courage to stand up in dangerous situations and declare his belief to those who would listen to him. He suffered much persecution and humiliation because of the service he was rendering to bring souls unto our Lord and Savior.

As we read on in his missionary experiences, we find him so enthused with the service he is rendering that he almost wishes he did not have the limits of mortality to restrict him in his work. Listen to his words now:

*O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people!*

*Yea, I would declare unto every soul, as with the voice of thunder, repentance and the plan of redemption, that they should repent and come unto our God, that there might not be more sorrow upon all the face of the earth. [Alma 29:1–2]*

What an example of the “I’m-glad-I-did” attitude!

Reaching back into the history of mankind, if we could select just one principle that would especially contribute to the “I’m-glad-I-did” memories, what would it be? I think the choice is obvious. It would be the principle of obedience. When our first earthly parents found themselves cast out of the Garden of Eden into the lone and dreary world, they found a new burdensome requirement thrust upon them: to obtain their bread by the sweat of their brow. Overwhelmed by their new responsibility they turned to the Lord. The scriptures record the results of their petition:

*And Adam and Eve, his wife, called upon the name of the Lord, and they heard the voice of the Lord from the way toward the Garden of Eden, speaking unto them, and they saw him not; for they were shut out from his presence.*

*And he gave unto them commandments, that they should worship the Lord their God, and should offer the firstlings of their flocks, for an offering unto the Lord. And Adam was obedient unto the commandments of the Lord.*

*And after many days an angel of the Lord appeared unto Adam, saying: Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord? And Adam said unto him: I know not, save the Lord commanded me.*

*And then the angel spake, saying: This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth.*

*Wherefore, thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore.*

*And in that day the Holy Ghost fell upon Adam, which beareth record of the Father and the Son, saying: I am the Only Begotten of the Father from the beginning, henceforth and forever, that as thou hast fallen thou mayest be redeemed, and all mankind, even as many as will.*

*And in that day Adam blessed God and was filled, and began to prophesy concerning all the families of the earth, saying: Blessed be the name*

*of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God.*

*And Eve, his wife, heard all these things and was glad, saying: Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient. [Moses 5:4–11]*

It is interesting to note what a special peace and contentment filled the souls of Adam and Eve once they understood the purpose of their being and the rules by which they would live in order to enjoy the continued blessings of the Lord.

There is not a more powerful lesson communicated by the Lord through his prophets than this message contained in the Doctrine and Covenants:

*There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—*

*And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated. [D&C 130:20–21]*

The Old Testament is full of stories that teach the principle of obedience. We find Samuel anointing Saul to be king over Israel. He was then given the charge to go and avenge the wrongs the Amalekites had inflicted upon Israel. He was to utterly destroy them and all they possessed. Saul marched against the Amalekites, proceeding on with his mission of destruction. But when he and the armies found the fine animals they possessed, they could not bring themselves to put the sword to such good stock. So they spared “the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good,” and destroyed the rest.

*Then came the word of the Lord unto Samuel, saying,*

*It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments. And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the Lord all night. . . .*

*And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord.*

*And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? . . .*

*And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me, . . . and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites.*

*But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal.*

*And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.*

*For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.*

*And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. [1 Samuel 15:9–11, 13–14, 20–24]*

Obedience helps make such good memories. The Book of Mormon is full of accounts of the blessings that come from obedience to the laws of the Lord and the destruction that is associated with disobedience. There is no greater evidence found than following Lehi’s family as they journeyed toward the promised land. Obedience brings instruments, tools, direction, food, and peace to his family.

Disobedience brings heartache, suffering, and turmoil.

The test of obedience comes almost immediately to the family as the father directs his sons to return to Jerusalem to obtain the brass plates that contain the scriptures and the family genealogy. Nephi responded to his father's request by saying:

*And it came to pass that I, Nephi, said unto my father: I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.* [1 Nephi 3:7]

After two failed attempts, they determined to go by faith, trusting in the Lord to accomplish their task. The third attempt brought success. Then Nephi learned a valuable lesson.

*Behold the Lord slayeth the wicked to bring forth his righteous purposes. It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief.*

*And now, when I, Nephi, had heard these words, I remembered the words of the Lord which he spake unto me in the wilderness, saying that: Inasmuch as thy seed shall keep my commandments, they shall prosper in the land of promise.*

*Yea, and I also thought that they could not keep the commandments of the Lord according to the law of Moses, save they should have the law.*

*And I also knew that the law was engraven upon the plates of brass.* [1 Nephi 4:13–16]

Can you imagine the feeling of joy that filled the soul of Nephi as he delivered the record to his father, and also as they examined it and found it to contain the five books of Moses plus the genealogy of Lehi? Here was proof that he was a descendant of Joseph who was sold into Egypt. Again we read the reaction of Lehi as he

studied the brass plates that his son had delivered to him:

*And now when my father saw all these things, he was filled with the Spirit, and began to prophesy concerning his seed—*

*That these plates of brass should go forth unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people who were of his seed.*

*Wherefore, he said that these plates of brass should never perish; neither should they be dimmed any more by time. And he prophesied many things concerning his seed.*

*And it came to pass that thus far I and my father had kept the commandments wherewith the Lord had commanded us.*

*And we had obtained the records which the Lord had commanded us, and searched them and found that they were desirable; yea, even of great worth unto us, insomuch that we could preserve the commandments of the Lord unto our children.* [1 Nephi 5:17–21]

The *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* states:

*Obedience in the context of the gospel of Jesus Christ means to comply with God's will, to live in accordance with his teachings and the promptings of his spirit, and to keep his commandments. Disobedience means to do anything less, whether it be to follow Satan and his will, to live in accordance with one's own selfish wants and desires, or to be a "slothful" person who must be "compelled in all things" (D&C 58:26).*

*Part of God's purpose in designing mortal life for his children was to "prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them" (Abr. 3:25; cf. D&C 98:14). Passing such a test is necessary for one to progress to become like God because he, himself, lives in accordance with law and principles of justice (Alma 42:22–26; see Godhood). Thus, obedience to divine law is essential to eternal progression, and those who live obediently in this life will "have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever" (Abr.3:26).*

[*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, vol. 3 (New York: Macmillan Co., 1992), pp. 1020–21]

We all make daily entries in our book of life. Occasionally we take it from the shelf and examine the entries we are making. What kind of memories will flood your mind as you examine the pages of your personal entries? How many pages will contain “I-wish-I-had” entries? Will there be entries of procrastination and failure to take advantage of special opportunities? Will you find there entries of thoughtlessness in treatment of family, friends, or even strangers? Will there be those of remorse resulting from acts of unrighteousness and disobedience? Will there be acts of dishonesty and lack of trust? Will there be entries showing a lack of faith and a turning to the destructive powers of worldliness?

Fortunately, each day brings a clean, white page on which to change entries from “I wish I had” to “I’m glad I did” through the process of recognition, remorse, repentance, and restitution. The harder we try to make many “I’m glad-I-did” entries each hour of each day, the more “I-wish-I-had” marks will find their way into the corners of our minds. Feelings of depression for past acts or missed opportunities will be outshone by memory banks filled with exhilaration and enthusiasm and with the joy of living.

As you examine the memorabilia you have put into your book of life, will you find the ones prescribed by the Lord in being obedient to his laws? Will there be baptismal certificates, priesthood ordinations for both the Aaronic

and Melchizedek priesthoods for the men and Pursuit of Excellence awards for the women, and, of course, a letter of honorable release from a full-time mission? Will there be current temple recommends, a marriage license for a marriage performed in the holy temple, tithing receipts, and acceptance to priesthood and auxiliary calls? Some of these mentioned may still be blank spaces as part of your future plans.

My counsel to you tonight is to fill up your memory bank and your book of life with as many “I’m-glad-I-did” activities as you can possibly crowd into one lifetime. King Benjamin in his great address counseled us on obedience by saying:

*And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it. [Mosiah 2:41]*

It is our hope and prayer that each of us will find the commitment and discipline in our lives to seek after those positive experiences that will lead to liberty and eternal life. It is my witness to you that God lives. It is by conforming our lives to his law that we will find true happiness here and eternal opportunities in the life to come. I say this in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.