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Blessing THOSE WHO ARE Less Active

We discover many of life's beautiful truths through our spiritual senses rather than through our physical senses. In fact, many important things—including eternal things—can be felt but not seen.

The Apostle Paul taught this principle to the Corinthian Saints: “We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Love is learned and felt primarily through the spiritual senses. Likewise, compassion, friendship, longsuffering, and faith are fruits of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22). Heavenly Father uses these feelings of the Spirit to bless His children, including those who have strayed.



*As we live in tune with
the Spirit and seek the
Lord's help, He will bless
our efforts to bring His lost
sheep back to the fold.*

I have lived most of my life in the Pacific Area. Many people of the Pacific have a profound understanding of the importance of the unseen things described by Paul, and many clearly prioritize spiritual things over physical needs.

This area of the Church is diverse, with developed and sophisticated nations, such as Australia and New

Zealand, as well as farming and fishing nations, such as Tonga and Samoa, where Church members represent high proportions of the population. Then there are developing nations, such as Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, where significant challenges confront the people.

This diversity provides opportunities to learn.

Urgency to Visit the Less Active

One such learning experience stands out. As an Area Seventy, I had been assigned to preside at a stake conference in New Zealand. Only a few months before, President Thomas S. Monson had delivered a powerful address to all the Seventies of the world. His address centered on rescuing those who had slipped away from the ordinances of the gospel.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRIAN CALL

As a result of President Monson's address and the consequent challenge he gave us, I felt an urgency to visit and invite those not fully involved in the gospel to return to the covenants and ordinances of salvation. I invited stake presidents to take me with them during stake conference weekends to visit less-active members. Those visits were always wonderful.

One Saturday during a particular stake conference weekend, the stake president and I visited several families. The husband and wife of one of these families had been married for about 10 years and had been sealed in the temple but were now less active. They welcomed us warmly, and we had a spiritual visit. As the visit was ending, I felt prompted to ask the husband if he would like a blessing and then to ask him to give his wife a blessing.

This was an unusual prompting. I had been taught that as a guest in another's home, I should take a subordinate role and that the head of the home should be the one who decides what is done. This brother, however, was grateful for the offer of a blessing, and he was visibly moved after the stake president and I had finished.

As he arose, however, he asked whether one of us would bless his wife. He told us that despite being married 10 years, he had never given her a blessing and was uncomfortable doing so.

"We will help you," I said, encouraging him.

After we had explained how to give a blessing and helped him rehearse what to say at the beginning and at the end, he gave his wife a wonderful blessing. When he finished, we all had moist eyes, and he and his wife accepted our invitation to return to the gospel.

As a result of this tender experience, the stake president felt inspired during his address to stake members the next day to challenge priesthood holders to return home after stake conference and to give blessings to family members.

Prompted to Bless

As that Sunday session of stake conference ended, I felt another prompting—this time to approach a young sister who was sitting about 10 rows from the front of the chapel and ask whether she needed a blessing. I did not know her, but the prompting was compelling.

Taken aback, the sister said hesitantly, "No, thank you."

I was somewhat grateful for her reply, but I felt that I had done as the Spirit had directed. I returned to the front of the chapel to greet members when this same young woman suddenly came forward and asked me whether I was still willing to give her a blessing. I told her "of course" and suggested that she go to the stake president's office, where we would join her shortly.

As the stake president and I made our way to his office, I asked about her. He

explained that she had just returned to Church after about 10 years of not attending. She was living alone, but during those 10 years she had led a life contrary to gospel standards.

Before the blessing, this young sister told us of her feelings of unworthiness. During her time away from the Church, she said, she had simply done what she wanted with no thought of spiritual matters. She had since reawakened to the gospel but felt that she had slipped so far behind in her spiritual development that she had no hope of ever catching up.



The laborers who enter the vineyard late will receive the same reward as those who have long labored there.

We taught her that the laborers who enter the vineyard late—and those who return to the vineyard after leaving for a time—will still receive the same reward as those who have long labored there (see Matthew 20:1–16). Then we gave her a priesthood blessing.

As the voice of that blessing, I was overwhelmed by the outpouring of love I felt that the Lord had for her. It was a more powerful feeling than I had ever felt before—one that made me aware that I was in the presence of a particularly noble spirit. As we finished the blessing, the sister rose from the chair. Two black lines of mascara were running from beneath her eyes. I too was moved to tears.

The Lord had allowed me to see that this exceptional young lady was in the early stages of a process that we all must experience to achieve our full potential here on earth. When we lose our way spiritually and when we commit sin, we all must humble ourselves and repent.

As the Apostle Paul taught the Galatians, this life is the time for the spirit to subdue the flesh. “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Galatians 5:17).

Whether we reach our potential depends on whether our spirits govern our bodies, whether we prevail over “the natural man” (Mosiah 3:19). In today’s world, many seem to have no fight for this battle. The appetites of the flesh govern their lives, and the flesh subdues their spirits.

This young woman was on a path that would enable her spirit to subdue the flesh. She had begun a contest she was determined to win.

“Walk in the Spirit”

As I left the stake that day, I asked the stake president to provide me contact information for those I had met that weekend so I could encourage them to continue on the gospel path and to remember the commitments they had made.



The young sister continued to progress and to do so rapidly. By her faith, she began to “walk in the Spirit” and to “live in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16, 25). She kept in touch and confided in me about the significant challenges she had overcome and has since faced. She has become a dear friend to our family, and we have seen the strength of her spirit as she has drawn close to the Savior.

She now enjoys the blessings of the temple, has served as an ordinance worker, and radiates the spiritual gifts of charity and goodness. She has since married a worthy young man in the temple.

The spiritual has clearly overcome the temporal in this young lady. We have seen her heart become pure, and she has “no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2).

Perhaps the Lord’s knowledge of the nobility of her soul was the cause of the prompting I received that day. That prompting has blessed me to see Heavenly Father’s power and grace manifest in her life.

We all have a responsibility to help our less-active brothers and sisters, and we can all be prompted in ways to bless them. As we live in tune with the Spirit and seek the Lord’s help, He will bless our efforts in “bringing them back to the fold” (“Dear to the Heart of the Shepherd,” *Hymns*, no. 221; see also Alma 26:4). ■