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Coming to Ourselves: The Sacrament, the Temple, and Sacrifice in Service

We become converted and spiritually self-reliant as we prayerfully live our covenants.

The Savior told His disciples about a son who left his wealthy father, went to a far country, and wasted his inheritance. When a famine arose, the young man took the lowly job of feeding swine. He was so hungry that he wanted to eat the husks meant for the animals.

Away from home, far from the place he wanted to be, and in his destitute condition, something of eternal significance happened in the life of this young man. In the Savior's words, "he came to himself."¹ He remembered who he was, realized what he had been missing, and began to desire the blessings freely available in his father's house.

Throughout our lives, whether in times of darkness, challenge, sorrow, or sin, we may feel the Holy Ghost reminding us that we are truly sons and daughters of a caring Heavenly Father, who loves us, and we may

hunger for the sacred blessings that only He can provide. At these times we should strive to *come to ourselves* and come back into the light of our Savior's love.

These blessings rightfully belong to all of Heavenly Father's children. Desiring these blessings, including a life of joy and happiness, is an essential part of Heavenly Father's plan for each one of us. The prophet Alma taught, "Even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you."²

As our spiritual desires increase, we become spiritually self-reliant. How, then, do we help others, ourselves, and our families increase our desires to follow the Savior and live His gospel? How do we strengthen our desires to repent, become worthy, and endure to the end? How do we help our youth and young adults let these desires work in them until they are

converted and become true "saint[s] through the atonement of Christ"?³

We become converted and spiritually self-reliant as we prayerfully live our covenants—through worthily partaking of the sacrament, being worthy of a temple recommend, and sacrificing to serve others.

To worthily partake of the sacrament, we remember that we are renewing the covenant we made at baptism. For the sacrament to be a spiritually cleansing experience each week, we need to prepare ourselves *before* coming to sacrament meeting. We do this by deliberately leaving behind our daily work and recreation and letting go of worldly thoughts and concerns. As we do, we make room in our minds and hearts for the Holy Ghost.

Then we are prepared to ponder on the Atonement. More than just thinking about the facts of the Savior's suffering and death, our pondering helps us to recognize that through the Savior's sacrifice, we have the hope, opportunity, and strength to make real, heartfelt changes in our lives.

As we sing the sacrament hymn, participate in the sacrament prayers, and partake of the emblems of His flesh and blood, we prayerfully seek forgiveness for our sins and shortcomings. We think about the promises we made and kept during the previous week and make specific personal commitments to follow the Savior during the coming week.

Parents and leaders, you can help youth experience the incomparable blessings of the sacrament by providing special opportunities for them to study, discuss, and discover the relevance of the Atonement in their lives. Let them search the scriptures for themselves and teach one another from their own experiences.

Fathers, priesthood leaders, and

quorum presidencies have a special responsibility to help Aaronic Priesthood holders earnestly prepare to perform their sacred sacrament duties. This preparation is made throughout the week by living gospel standards. When young men prepare, bless, and pass the sacrament in worthiness and reverence, they literally follow the example of the Savior at the Last Supper⁴ and become like Him.

I testify that the sacrament gives us an opportunity to *come to ourselves* and experience “a mighty change” of heart⁵—to remember who we are and what we most desire. As we renew the covenant to keep the commandments, we obtain the companionship of the Holy Ghost to lead us back into

our Heavenly Father’s presence. No wonder we are commanded to “meet together oft to partake of [the] bread and [water]”⁶ and to partake of the sacrament to our souls.⁷

Our desires to return to Heavenly Father increase as we, in addition to taking the sacrament, become worthy to obtain a temple recommend. We become worthy by steadily and steadfastly obeying the commandments. This obedience begins in childhood and intensifies through experiences in the Aaronic Priesthood and Young Women during the years of preparation. Then, hopefully, priests and Laurels set goals and specifically prepare themselves to be endowed and sealed in the temple.

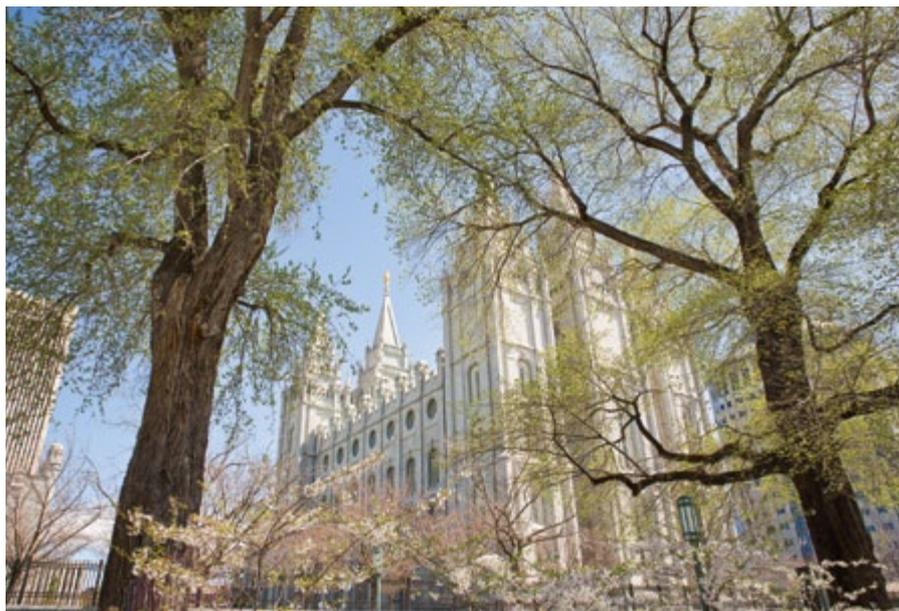
What are the standards for recommend holders? The Psalmist reminds us:

“Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?

“He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart.”⁸

Worthiness to hold a temple recommend gives us the strength to keep our temple covenants. How do we personally gain that strength? We strive to obtain a testimony of Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Ghost, the reality of the Atonement, and the truthfulness of the Prophet Joseph Smith and the Restoration. We sustain our leaders, treat our families with kindness, stand as a witness of the Lord’s true Church, attend our Church





meetings, honor our covenants, fulfill parental obligations, and live a virtuous life. You may say that sounds like just being a faithful Latter-day Saint! You are right. The standard for temple recommend holders is not too high for us to achieve. It is simply to faithfully live the gospel and follow the prophets.

Then, as endowed temple recommend holders, we establish patterns of Christlike living. These include obedience, making sacrifices to keep the commandments, loving one another, being chaste in thought and action, and giving of ourselves to build the kingdom of God. Through the Savior's Atonement and by following these basic patterns of faithfulness, we receive "power from on high"⁹ to face the challenges of life. We need this divine power today more than ever. It is power we receive only through temple ordinances. I testify that the sacrifices we make to receive temple ordinances are worth every effort we can make.

As our desires to learn and live the gospel increase, we naturally seek to serve one another. The Savior said to Peter, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."¹⁰ I am impressed that today's youth have deep desires to serve and bless others—to make a difference in this world. They also crave the joy that their service brings.

However, it is difficult for youth to understand how present actions will prepare them for or disqualify them from future service opportunities. All of us have an "imperative duty"¹¹ to assist our youth in preparing for life-long service by helping them become self-reliant. In addition to the spiritual self-reliance we have been discussing, there is temporal self-reliance, which includes getting a postsecondary education or vocational training, learning to work, and living within our means. By avoiding debt and saving money now, we are prepared for full-time Church service in the years to come. The purpose of both temporal and spiritual self-reliance is to get ourselves on higher ground so that we can lift others in need.

Whether we are young or old, what we do today determines the service we will be able to render and enjoy tomorrow. As the poet reminds us, "Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: 'It might have been!'"¹² Let us not live our lives in regret of what we did or did not do!

Beloved brothers and sisters, the young man spoken about by the Savior, the one we refer to as the prodigal son, *did come home*. His father had not forgotten him; his father was waiting. And "when [the son] was yet a great way off, his father saw

him, and had compassion, and ran, and . . . kissed him."¹³ In honor of his son's return, he called for a robe, a ring, and a celebration with a fatted calf¹⁴—reminders that no blessings will be withheld if we faithfully endure in walking the path back to our Heavenly Father.

With His love and the love of His Son in my heart, I challenge each of us to follow our spiritual desires and *come to ourselves*. Let's have a talk with ourselves in the mirror and ask, "Where do I stand on living my covenants?" We are on the right path when we can say, "I worthily partake of the sacrament each week, I am worthy to hold a temple recommend and go to the temple, and I sacrifice to serve and bless others."

I share my special witness that God so loves each one of us "that he gave his only begotten Son"¹⁵ to atone for our sins. He knows us and waits for us, even when we are a great way off. As we act on our desires and come to ourselves, we will be "encircled about eternally in the arms of his love"¹⁶ and welcomed home. I so testify in the holy name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Luke 15:17.
2. Alma 32:27.
3. Mosiah 3:19.
4. See Matthew 26:17–28; Luke 22:1–20.
5. Alma 5:12; see also Mosiah 5:2; Alma 5:13–14.
6. Moroni 6:6.
7. See Moroni 4:3; Doctrine and Covenants 20:77.
8. Psalm 24:3–4.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 95:8.
10. Luke 22:32.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 123:11.
12. John Greenleaf Whittier, "Maud Muller," *The Complete Poetical Works of Whittier* (1894), 48.
13. Luke 15:20.
14. See Luke 15:22–24.
15. John 3:16.
16. 2 Nephi 1:15.