



**By Elder  
Kent F. Richards**

Served as a  
General Authority  
Seventy from 2009  
to 2016

# Pay Attention TO THE LITTLE THINGS

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It is in the seemingly small things of our lives that our deep desires and personal character are formed.

**M**y great-grandfather George F. Richards was a humble farmer who raised his family of 15 children on hard work and a willingness to follow the Lord. When he was a young man of 23, he struggled to make a life for his family.

As sometimes happened in those days, he received a letter of inquiry from the secretary of the First Presidency about whether he was available to serve a mission. He didn't then know his future. Like you, he arose early and faced the challenges of each day, working hard and rejoicing in each small success. Note the expressions of his young heart as he responded to the First Presidency:

"I am 23 years of age. . . . I have a wife and one child, have never been on a foreign mission. Financially, I am in poor circumstances at present, being in debt more than \$400.00. . . .

"While I feel that I am poor, I do not wish to let that stand between me and my duties as a latter-day Saint. That which I have is upon the altar and subject to the direction of those in authority, as is also my time and life if necessary."<sup>1</sup>

Later, at age 45, he was called to serve as an Apostle. Soon after his call, George wrote a letter to his brother about being prepared for callings in the Church:

"I should feel badly indeed, if when the occasion presents itself . . . , some little thing such as a non-observance of the word of wisdom, a neglect of your prayers, or anything of the kind should block your way. It is by the observance of these little things that men show whether theirs is an obedient and willful spirit. . . . A straw thrown up indicates the direction of the wind, even so the small things of our lives indicate largely our future destiny."<sup>2</sup>

Elsewhere he taught, "Let us keep our covenants by keeping the commandments as fast as made known unto us, attending to the little things and prove our spirits to be willing." And again: "Obedience to the gospel, to simple things, shows our spirits."<sup>3</sup>

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### **"SEEMINGLY SMALL THINGS"**

When my wife and I were a young couple a few years out of medical training, President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) said:

"The basic decisions needed for us to move forward, as a people, must be made by the individual members of the Church. . . .

". . . We have been diverted, at times, from fundamentals on which we must now focus in order to move forward as a person or as a people.

"Seemingly small efforts in the life of each member could do so much to move the Church forward as never before. . . .

"Are we ready, brothers and sisters, to do these seemingly small things out of which great blessings will proceed? . . .

"Let us trust the Lord and take the next steps in our individual lives. He has promised us that he will be our tender tutor."<sup>4</sup>

It is in the "seemingly small things" of our lives that our deep desires and personal character are formed. The Lord needs you. He wants to lift you, teach you, and help you. The Lord wants your heart first. He knows you and knows your path. He calls you and prepares you to succeed. It is critical to pay attention to the little things as a measure and a guide to you personally in your progress along your own path.

### **THE CHALLENGE OF DISTRACTION**

It is so easy to get caught up in the distractions of life. Perhaps your generation's greatest challenge is to manage the draw and attraction—and distraction—of electronic media and gaming. But whatever is pulling you, your life and your future are at stake. Why do you think President Russell M. Nelson invited the youth last year to participate in a seven-day social media fast?<sup>5</sup>

When I was serving in the Europe Area Presidency, I was assigned to a stake conference

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in Lisbon, Portugal. As part of the agenda for Saturday morning, I invited the stake president to identify some families we could briefly visit together.

As we drove to one particular home by appointment, the president told me that the father had served a full-time mission, had married a wonderful woman, and was raising four precious children. But he had slipped away from activity. He had been distracted.

When we arrived for our visit, we found a beautiful family, all dressed in Sunday best on a Saturday morning, waiting for us. We gathered in a circle in their living room. Their oldest son, age 15, was the teachers quorum president in the ward. I turned to him and asked, "What are you planning to do

three years from now?" He responded immediately without any hesitation, "I will be serving a mission."

Then I asked a key question that came through inspiration: "Who will help you to prepare?" Without any hesitation, he looked directly at his father, pointed his extended arm and finger right at him, and said, "He will."

The Spirit came into that room with such power. The father began to weep and, after a moment's quiet contemplation, asked me if he could bear his testimony to his children and to his wife. He did so with tears streaming down his cheeks. In that moment, his son had prompted his heart to change. The father knew instantly what he needed to do.

As we were closing our visit, I taught the parents through the children three words in English as a reminder of the little things they needed to do as a family each day: *read, pray, and obey*. Then we chanted together, "Read, pray, and obey." Today the son is on a mission, and the father is a counselor in the bishopric.

Reading, praying, and obeying are little things. Add whatever else the Spirit whispers to you personally, and you have a formula in which little things help great things come to pass.

I learned a critical lesson as a young man. Life became very busy very quickly. I married my dear wife 14 months after I returned home from my mission. The next month, I started four years of medical school, which were followed by five years of surgical residency training.

I had to make each day succeed on its own and not put off my spiritual needs for even one day. I came to love my private time early in the morning for my personal scripture study and prayers.

I remember the day I read from Wilford Woodruff's journal about an experience he had while crossing the plains with the first Latter-day Saint pioneer company. On May 30, 1847, he wrote: "In the morning I shaved, cleansed my body, put on clean clothing, . . . read a chapter in the Book of Mormon, humbled myself before the Lord, and poured out my soul in prayer before Him, and His spirit descended upon me and I was blessed and prepared for the service of the day."<sup>6</sup>

My young brothers and sisters, we become who we will be by taking daily steps and by doing the small, important things.

### THE LORD WILL LEAD YOU

Pray, be humble and meek, obey the Lord's ordinances, and keep your covenants. We simply must have faith to do the simple things for our own peace and growth. Our actions are a clear and definitive way for us to measure

our own faith (see Doctrine and Covenants 52:20).

"And thus we see that by small means the Lord can bring about great things" (1 Nephi 16:29). It has always been so.

The Lord will lead us through the wilderness of life's journey—if we are willing. He provided for Lehi and his family the Liahona. It was a miracle. It gave them a new revelation every day that showed them the way to go. But it worked only "according to the heed and diligence which they gave unto" the Lord and the instructions of the Liahona (see Mosiah 1:16).

The Lord promised Nephi, and He promises us, that whoever "would hold fast unto [the word of God], they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction" (1 Nephi 15:24). The Holy Ghost is our personal Liahona.

Remember, "a straw thrown up indicates the direction of the wind." Check the direction of the wind and determine which direction you are going. Notice particularly the seemingly small things of your life.

Be humble and stand strong against the distracting influences around you. Remember the Lord's words: "Be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great" (Doctrine and Covenants 64:33). ■

*From a devotional address, "A Straw Thrown Up Indicates the Direction of the Wind," delivered at Brigham Young University–Idaho on June 5, 2018.*

#### NOTES

1. George F. Richards journal excerpts, 1883–1950, transcript, 16, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.
2. George F. Richards journal excerpts, 105, 106.
3. George F. Richards journal excerpts, 104, 122; capitalization standardized.
4. Spencer W. Kimball, "Let Us Move Forward and Upward," *Ensign*, May 1979, 82.
5. See Russell M. Nelson and Wendy W. Nelson, "Hope of Israel" (worldwide youth devotional, June 3, 2018), [HopeofIsrael.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](http://HopeofIsrael.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).
6. In Matthias F. Cowley, *Wilford Woodruff: History of His Life and Labors* (1909), 292.

