

Feeding His Lambs



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The Savior taught Peter and His other Apostles and disciples why and how they were to nourish others. You remember that in the Bible account He fed them before He taught them. He had been crucified and then resurrected. His servants had gone to Galilee. They had fished through the night, catching nothing. When they drew near to shore in the dawn, they did not at first recognize Him. He called out to them, telling them where to cast their nets, and when they did as He told them, the nets were filled. They rushed to greet Him on the shore.

They found a fire of coals with fish cooking and bread. I have often wondered who laid the fire, caught the fish, and cooked the meal, but it was the Master who prepared

His disciples to be fed more than fish and bread. He let them eat first. And then He taught them of spiritual feeding. And He gave a commandment to them that still stands for each of us.

“So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea,

Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs” (John 21:15).

Our Covenant to Nourish

The Saints of God have always been under covenant to nourish each other spiritually, especially those tender in the gospel. We are blessed to live in a time when a great increase in that capacity to nourish new members of the Church must and therefore will be poured out upon the faithful Saints. That power has been given before among the Lord’s people. This is the description of how the Lord’s people did it once in a time recounted in the Book of Mormon:

“They were numbered . . . that they might be remembered and nourished by the good word of God, to keep them in the right way, to keep them continually watchful unto prayer, relying alone upon the merits of Christ, who was the author and the finisher of their faith” (Moroni 6:4).

All of us have tried at some time to nourish another person’s faith. Most of us have felt the concern of others for our own faith, and with it we have felt their love. More than a few of us have had a child look up to us and say, “Would you like to go to church with





me?” or, “Would you pray with me?” And we have had our disappointments. Someone we love may not have accepted our attempts to nourish his or her faith. We know from painful experience that God respects the choice of His children not to be nourished. Yet this is a time to feel renewed optimism and hope

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that our power to nourish will be increased.

The Lord through His living prophet has told us that He will preserve the bounteous harvest of new converts entering the waters of baptism. And the Lord will do it through us. So we can have confidence that by doing simple things, things that even a child can do, we will be granted greater power to nourish tender faith.

The place to start is with our own hearts. What we want with all our hearts will determine in large degree whether we can claim our right to the companionship of the Holy Ghost, without which there can be no spiritual nourishing. We can begin today to try to see those we are to nourish as our Heavenly Father sees them and so feel some of what He feels for them.

Those new members of the Church are His children. He has known them and they have known Him in the world before this one. His purpose and that of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is to have them return to Him and to give them eternal life if they will only choose it. He has led and sustained His missionaries by the Holy Spirit to find and teach and baptize them. He allowed His Son to pay the price of their sins. Our Father and the Savior see those converts as tender lambs, purchased with a price we cannot fathom.

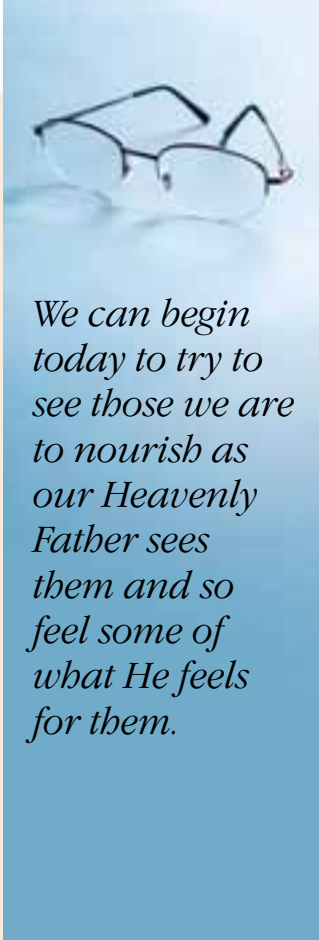
A mortal parent may appreciate, in some small way, the feelings of a loving Heavenly Father. When our children come to the age when they must leave our direct care, we feel anxiety for their safety and concern that



those who are to help them will not fail them. We can feel at least some of the Father’s and the Savior’s love for the new members of the Church and the trust They place in us to nourish.

Our Dependence on the Spirit

Those feelings in our hearts for the new members will go far to qualify us for the help



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of the Spirit and thus overcome the fears that may deter us from our sacred responsibility. It is wise to fear that our own skills are inadequate to meet the charge we have to nourish the faith of others. Our own abilities, however great, will not be enough. But that realistic view of our limitations creates a humility that can lead to dependence on the Spirit and thus to power.

President Brigham Young (1801–77) told us to have courage despite our weaknesses: “In addressing a congregation, though the speaker be unable to say more than half a dozen sentences, and those awkwardly constructed, if his heart is pure before God, those few broken sentences are of more value than the greatest eloquence without the Spirit of the Lord and of more real worth in the sight of God, angels, and all good men. In praying, though a person’s words be few and awkwardly expressed, if the heart is pure before God, that prayer will avail more than the eloquence of a Cicero [a first century B.C. Roman orator]. What does the Lord, the Father of us all, care about our mode of expression? The simple, honest heart is of more avail with the Lord than all the pomp, pride, splendor, and eloquence produced by men. When he looks upon a heart full of sincerity, integrity, and child-like simplicity, he sees a principle that will endure forever—“That is the spirit of my own kingdom—the spirit I have given to my children.”¹

A child can do the things that will give us power to nourish the faith of others. Children could invite a recent convert to come with them to a meeting. Children could smile and greet a new member coming into a chapel or into a class. So can we. And as surely as we do, the Holy Ghost will be our companion. The fear of not knowing what to say and of being rejected will be taken from us. The newcomer will not appear to be a stranger to us. And the Holy Ghost will begin nourishing him or her even before we have spoken of gospel truths.

It does not require a calling more than being a member

to nourish by reaching out in kindness. Those of us who have no calling to teach or to preach can nourish with the good word of God if we prepare for it. We can do it every time we speak with a new member and every time we participate in a class discussion. We need help from the Spirit to speak the words that will nourish and strengthen.

Two Keys to Receiving Help

There are two great keys to inviting the Spirit to guide what words we speak as we feed others. They are the daily study of the scriptures and the prayer of faith.

The Holy Ghost will guide what we say if we study and ponder the scriptures every day. The words of the scriptures invite the Holy Spirit. The Lord said it this way: “Seek not to declare my word, but first seek to obtain my word, and then shall your tongue be loosed; then, if you desire, you shall have my Spirit and my word, yea, the power of God unto the convincing of men” (D&C 11:21). With daily study of the scriptures, we can count on this blessing even in casual conversations or in a class when we may be asked by a teacher to respond to a question. We will experience the power the Lord promised: “Neither take ye thought beforehand what ye shall say; but treasure up in your minds continually the words of life, and it shall be given you in the very hour that portion that shall be meted unto every man” (D&C 84:85).

We treasure the word of God not only by reading the words of the scriptures but by studying them. We may be nourished more by pondering a few words, allowing the Holy Ghost to make them treasures to us, than by passing quickly and superficially over whole chapters of scripture.



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Just as pondering the scriptures invites the Holy Ghost, so does daily pleading in prayer. If we do not ask in prayer, He will rarely come, and without our petition, He is not likely to linger. “And the Spirit shall be given unto you by the prayer of faith; and if ye receive not the Spirit ye shall not teach” (D&C 42:14). Heartfelt, constant pleading for the companionship of the Holy Ghost, with the pure intent to nourish our Father’s children, will surely bring blessings to us and to those we love and serve.

The good word of God with which we must nourish is the simple doctrine of the gospel. We need not fear either simplicity or repetition.

The Lord Himself described how that doctrine goes into the hearts of men and women to nourish them:

“This is my doctrine, and it is the doctrine which the Father hath given unto me; and I bear record of the Father, and the Father beareth record of me, and the Holy Ghost

beareth record of the Father and me; and I bear record that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me.

“And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God.

“And whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be damned.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and I bear record of it from the Father; and whoso believeth in me believeth in the Father also; and unto him will the Father bear record of me, for he will visit him with fire and with the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 11:32–35).

The Lord went on to describe those who would be nourished by that simple doctrine and so endure, those who would inherit the celestial kingdom, as those who were childlike. It takes a childlike heart to feel the promptings of the Spirit, to surrender to those commands, and to obey. That is what it takes to be nourished by the good word of God.

The Tenderness of Lambs

And that is why we can be so optimistic in our charge to nourish the new members of the Church. However much or little they knew of the doctrine, they have just submitted humbly to the ordinance of baptism and received the right to the companionship of the Holy Ghost. And so the very tenderness of their faith, which leads the Savior to refer to them as lambs, comes at a time when they have proven themselves willing to do what the Savior asks of them.

If the full requirements of their new membership are explained clearly and with love and if the opportunity to serve in the Church is extended wisely and their performance in that service judged with charity and nurtured



with patient encouragement, they will be strengthened by the companionship of the Holy Ghost, and then they will be nurtured by power beyond our own. As they endure, even the gates of hell will not prevail against them.

President Brigham Young made the promise of how their strength to stand would grow: “Those who humble themselves before the Lord, and wait upon him with a perfect heart and willing mind, will receive little by little, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little, ‘now and again,’ as [Brother] John Taylor says, until they receive a certain amount. Then they have to nourish and cherish what they receive, and make it their constant companion, encouraging every good thought, doctrine and principle, and doing every good work they can perform, until by and by the Lord is in them a well of water springing up unto everlasting life.”²

That is what it means in Moroni when it says, “Relying

alone upon the merits of Christ, who was the author and the finisher of their faith” (Moroni 6:4). It is the Savior who made possible our being purified through His Atonement and our obedience to His commandments. And it is the Savior who will nourish those who go down in faith into the waters of baptism and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. When they always remember Him and when they continue in childlike obedience, it is He who will ensure that they have His Spirit always to be with them.

You and I can and will by small means be part of a great work. We will study and pray and serve to qualify for the companionship of the Holy Ghost. We will then be allowed to see the new members as precious, beloved children of our Heavenly Father, and we will be led to nourish them with love, with opportunity to serve, and with the good word of God. And then we will see in our own time what the great missionary Ammon described to his missionary companions, just as we are now companions to the missionaries laboring across the world:

“Behold, the field was ripe, and blessed are ye, for ye did thrust in the sickle, and did reap with your might, yea, all the day long did ye labor; and behold the number of your sheaves! And they shall be gathered into the garners, that they are not wasted.

“Yea, they shall not be beaten down by the storm at the last day; yea, neither shall they be harrowed up by the whirlwinds; but when the storm cometh they shall be gathered together in their place, that the storm cannot penetrate to them; yea, neither shall they be driven with fierce winds whithersoever the enemy listeth to carry them.

“But behold, they are in the hands of the Lord of the harvest, and they are his; and he will raise them up at the last day” (Alma 26:5–7).

We can by simple obedience help the Lord to take the lambs, His lambs, into His hands and take them in His arms home to their Father and our Father. I know that God will pour out the powers of heaven upon us as we join in preserving that sacred harvest of souls. ■

IDEAS FOR HOME TEACHERS

After prayerfully studying this message, share it using a method that encourages the participation of those you teach. Following are some examples:

1. After a family member reads the first three paragraphs of the message, ask the family: Why do you think the Lord fed His disciples before teaching them? How can we strengthen new members in our ward (or branch)?
2. Consider with family members some gospel doctrines that, if obeyed, would bless people they know. Discuss ways they could share or reinforce those doctrines with those people.
3. If the family you visit has children, consider showing a picture of a lamb. Ask, Why do lambs need to be watched over and cared for? Explain that people, like lambs, sometimes need help. Sharing the gospel, being a friend, or helping others through difficulties is similar to what a good shepherd does for sheep. Make a plan to help a neighbor, friend, or family member by completing a simple act of service.

NOTES

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (1997), 149.
2. “Discourse,” *Deseret News*, Mar. 25, 1857, 21.