

Lay Hold upon Every Good Gift
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This address was given Thursday, May 1, 2008, at the BYU Women's Conference

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Most often when I think about gifts, I think of things like the ability to sing and dance. Those are gifts I always wanted to have.

As a teenager, I once sang with my sister and a friend in church. Our little trio practiced diligently. The other two were good singers and had lovely voices. I was singing soprano and wasn't able to hit half of the high notes. The chorister, who had a beautiful soprano voice, sat on the front row of the chapel, just in front of us, and sang my part so we wouldn't be humiliated. I've learned that I'm a much better singer in a very large group—such as when the Conference Center is full and the Mormon Tabernacle Choir is behind me.

I was a member of the ward choir as a teenager, but our choir director finally asked me not to sing anymore because I would generally start giggling when I hit a bad note and make the people around me laugh. It didn't add to the reverence of a meeting.

My dancing career was painful as a child. I never really did take to it much. As a young adult, I was at a fireside when I thought I received some inspiration. The thought came into my mind to buy a pair of tap shoes. I purchased some later that week. I also purchased a cane and top hat. Down in my basement I began dancing up a storm. It really was great therapy and made me laugh—until I danced so long on the hard cement that I got shin splints and could hardly walk for a week. That ended my tap dancing gift before it was fully developed.

I won't even go into my craft skills. I still don't have any fingerprints or thumbprints, a result from using a hot glue gun at Homemaking night over 20 years ago. If I make a successful craft with assistance from others, the whole ward cheers for me.

Since making this evaluation of some of my “anti-gifts,” I’ve determined that a person can have other gifts besides singing, dancing and crafts, so I went to the scriptures to learn more about them.

As I studied the topic, I was captivated by how many times the gifts of God are mentioned in the scriptures. And even more exciting were the directions on how to obtain these gifts from Him. He has assured us that each of us has a gift (D&C 46:11). We have also been counseled to “lay hold upon every good gift” (Moroni 10:30). When we receive one, we’re advised to “neglect not the gift that is in thee” (1 Timothy 4:14).

Since Romans chapter 12 is not the chapter we generally study when discussing gifts of God, I decided to focus on this chapter and hope you will enjoy studying it with me during the next few minutes. Beginning with verse 5, it says:

5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. [In other words, we are all part of Christ’s Church, and even though each of us is an individual, we are all one as we share and seek to bless one another.]

6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, [each of us is given gifts that differ one from another, and that is what will enable us to help one another] whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith;

*7 Or ministry let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching;
8 Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.*

9 Let love be without dissimulation [in other words, love with sincerity]. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

10 Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;

11 Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;

12 Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;

13 Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.

14 Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.

15 Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

16 Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. [In other words, each of us is loved in the sight of God, and one person isn't better than another.]

17 Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

18 If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

This is a pretty good list of gifts. We don't have time today to discuss each one, so I've chosen a few to focus on. Some overlap.

Ministering (Or Love—Brotherly Love)

Some of you know I worked in social work for many years, primarily with abused and neglected children and their families. I had the opportunity to meet many people dedicated to serving the less-fortunate and those who were struggling.

Sometimes the people I came in contact with were difficult to work with and talk to. Some had physical, mental, or emotional challenges that hampered communication. One professional I worked with was the epitome of ministering. Her name was Vicki. She was the director of a mental health organization for Utah. She had an unusual ability to love and care for people who were troubled and struggling so very much.

Vicki always had a smile, an infectious laugh, a kind word, a hug, and a "can-do" attitude. She worked tirelessly to find the resources each individual needed in order to help him or her understand their illness and get treatment to help them live a happy life.

Her work day wasn't from eight to five. She normally worked all day then attended meetings in the evenings or visited homes to help an individual. Her days were always very long. I believe her motto must have been, "to minister, serve, love, and give."

In addition to all she did for people in the mental health arena, she was a wonderful mother, grandmother, daughter, church worker, gardener, photographer, and friend. Every Sunday evening, she took dinner in to a widow who needed a visit.

She was driving to northern Utah to help a group of parents learn skills to help them assist their children who had mental illnesses, when bad weather caused a tragic accident that ended her life. Although many of the programs and resources she initiated helped hundreds of people, she was a wonderful example to me of ministering and she truly had the gift of loving and caring for people one-on-one.

Cheerfulness

All of us know people who are cheerful and happy. I can remember one roommate I had in college who had this unique gift. In fact, early each morning, she was cheerful to the point of annoyance. I sometimes found myself hoping that I could leave the apartment before she got up so I wouldn't have to respond cheerfully to her happy morning greeting.

Seriously, isn't it wonderful to be around people who are cheerful and happy? So often we find people who are gloomy, pessimistic, and generally see the negative side of things.

Years ago, I worked with a woman who had a negative thing to say every morning upon arriving at work. You could depend on it. Coworkers tried to back away as she began her negative thought for the day, because people naturally don't want to be around negativity all the time.

Those who are cheerful seem to draw others to them. I honestly feel that the Savior was a person who was cheerful and positive. People were drawn to Him. He blessed and comforted them. Love was apparent in His countenance.

Remember the reports of Joseph Smith being a cheerful man? People liked to be with him because he had a happy outlook on life. Even with the terrible persecutions he suffered, he was positive and happy. Cheerfulness is a great gift.

Cleave to That Which Is Good

In today's world, it is so easy to be surrounded with things that are less desirable. The world is increasingly evil; youth are bombarded with sleaze. I'm amazed and so impressed as I see so many youth turn away from those at school who take the Lord's name in vain and continually use profane and vulgar language.

I see youth turn away from movies and parties where sex, violence, drugs, and alcohol are promoted. I'm so thankful that these youth strive to "cleave to that which is good." They have been well taught by you mothers, leaders, teachers, and exemplary women in this Church. Thank you for helping them develop the gift of cleaving to that which is good.

Serving the Lord

During the sesquicentennial of the Relief Society in 1992, thousands upon thousands of LDS women around the world participated in service. The accounts received at Church headquarters were amazing.

Our wonderful Relief Society women, disciples of Jesus Christ, cared for the sick, the poor, and the needy. Hospitals were helped, food pantries were supplied, and blankets

and quilts were delivered by the thousands. Sisters aided the disabled, transformed homes needing repair, remodeled or built women's shelters, replenished and beautified parks and community places, performed temple ordinances for thousands of our deceased sisters, assembled hygiene kits, and served in literacy efforts that blessed countless lives. The list goes on.

Since that time, our sisters all over the world continue to render service on a daily basis. They serve their families, their neighbors, their communities, and in the Church with distinction and dedication. It is a thrill as I travel to hear just a few stories of women who have made great sacrifices to serve the Lord and one another.

One report I reread not long ago told about a dear sister in Switzerland who served as stake Relief Society president for twenty-five years, traveling over great distances to visit the presidencies in the wards and branches. When she was released, she was sustained as a counselor in her ward Relief Society presidency and served for an additional eleven years.

You dedicated sisters who serve the Lord, cheerfully doing whatever you are called to do, are great examples of magnifying the gifts you've been given. Serving the Lord with dedication is certainly a gift.

Others who have the gift of serving the Lord are our wonderful mission presidents and their wives. This service is truly twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. In my opinion, mission presidents and their wives should be given an automatic place in the Celestial Kingdom. These are Saints who use their gift of service to bless countless lives.

Patience in Tribulation

I have a dear friend who truly has the gift of being patient in tribulation. Sixteen years ago, Pat contracted breast cancer. The initial shock of this diagnosis was terrifying, but in spite of that, Pat's attitude was: "I will beat this. I will not let this get the best of me." My mother also had cancer at that time and passed away. While patiently dealing with her own disease, Pat was right there to give me comfort and assistance.

Pat patiently went through all of the treatment needed to recover from cancer and was successfully cured. However, a few years later, the cancer returned, this time with seemingly more strength and determination to take over her body.

Pat continues to live life with cheerfulness and optimism. In between the most serious times of her illness, she has lived in the Philippines with her husband and has traveled to India, Hong Kong, and many other parts of Asia. She has gone to England, Italy, France, and other countries in Europe. In addition, she has traveled all over the United States and Canada.

When she travels she doesn't just "sight-see." She climbs every mountain, visits every park, swims in every ocean or lake, looks at every display in countless museums, and

studies the history of every place she visits. It doesn't matter that she can't speak the language in many of these places; she communicates with her hands or by speaking English slowly and loudly.

Pat is a fighter and patiently endured the needed treatment, even selecting the most aggressive types that would leave her near death.

Today, sixteen years later, Pat's cancer has returned again, and still she patiently deals with tribulation. Her faith in Christ is unshakable. Despite her illness, she has the gift of patiently bearing her afflictions.

Bless Them Which Persecute You

Generally when I feel persecuted, I want to fight back. Although I haven't been able to cultivate this gift yet, I did find that when I try to bless those who persecute me, it turns out well.

Many years ago, we were dealing with some very difficult problems at work and tried to overhaul an entire system. As with any large and complicated system, change is difficult and time-consuming.

Each of the employees in our division had specific assignments needing to be accomplished for the change to take place. A committee met monthly to evaluate our progress and make further assignments.

Month after month at this evaluation meeting, one co-worker continually criticized and blamed me in front of the group for things that clearly were not my responsibility. I couldn't figure out where he was coming from or why he felt compelled to criticize me. I was developing unkind thoughts about this man, and others on the committee were becoming increasingly uncomfortable as his critical comments continued. The discord wasn't helping our work group.

At this same time, President Howard W. Hunter had just been sustained as the new president of the Church. He extended some beautiful words of counsel. He said, "I would invite all members of the Church to live with ever more attention to the life and example of the Lord Jesus Christ, especially the love and hope and compassion He displayed. . . . I pray that we might treat each other with more kindness, more courtesy, more humility and patience, and forgiveness" (Jay M. Todd, "President Howard W. Hunter: Fourteenth President of the Church," *Ensign*, Jul 1994, 2).

I tried taking these words to heart and had prayed that I might be kind, patient, and forgiving of others.

When I got to the work meeting that day, again this man began to rip on me. I fully wanted to lash back at him, silencing him once and for all. However, the words I had prayed that morning came forcefully to mind, so I remained silent.

When the meeting ended, I stepped over to him and asked if I could speak with him privately. He looked uncomfortable, but agreed. We stepped away from the others who were leaving the room.

I said, “John [not his real name], I’ve always had a great deal of respect for the work you do. You have so many talents and skills that have helped us a great deal. In the past, we’ve worked well together. But for several months now, I feel you’ve been upset about something. You seem to be angry with me. Have I done something to offend you? If so, I want to apologize. Please let me know what it is so I can make some improvements and we can both help this committee to do its work.”

He’d been looking down while I talked. Finally he raised his head and looked a little sheepish. He said that I hadn’t done anything wrong. He’d been frustrated that some of the processes hadn’t been able to be implemented quicker or better, and he really didn’t know why he was taking it out on me. He apologized for his critical comments.

I asked a favor of him. “If I do or say something that offends you or bothers you in the future, will you let me know? I really do want to have a good working relationship with you again like we had in the past.” He agreed, and we both left feeling good about our talk. In the coming days and months, he went out of his way to be kind and helpful.

After that experience, I was so thankful that I’d remembered what I had prayed for that morning. I was also grateful that, if only for that day, I was given the gift of trying to, “bless those who persecute you.” It made life so much sweeter.

Rejoice with Them That Do Rejoice

In my opinion, to “rejoice with them that do rejoice” is a very good gift to lay hold upon. I love hearing a choir sing songs such as, “Rejoice the Lord is King” or, “Now Let Us Rejoice.” These songs lift our hearts and inspire us.

How many of us rejoice when something wonderful happens to someone else? When you are twenty-nine years old and single, do you rejoice when a younger woman gets engaged? When you have been childless and your sister announces that they are expecting their fourth child, do you rejoice with them? When a sister in the ward shares with you that her husband has just been made vice president of a large firm and you know a handsome salary increase will accompany the promotion, do you rejoice with them?

I love the twenty-sixth chapter of Alma. There is much rejoicing in this chapter. Ammon and his brethren rejoice over their success as missionaries in helping to bring thousands of their brothers and sisters to a knowledge of the truth.

In verse one, he says, “How great reason have we to rejoice?” As a result of the conversion of so many people he says, “Behold, thousands of them do rejoice, and have been brought into the fold of God” (verse four).

In verses 11 and 12 Ammon says, “I do not boast in my own strength, nor in my own wisdom; but behold, my joy is full, yea, my heart is brim with joy, and I will rejoice in my God.

“Yea, I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things;”

Then in verse 16: “Therefore, let us glory, yea, we will glory in the Lord; yea, we will rejoice, for our joy is full; yea, we will praise our God forever.”

If you want to feel happy and full of joy, read this entire chapter a few times. One can’t help but feel to rejoice for the things that Ammon and his brethren felt.

Seek the gifts of God. He wants us to seek good gifts, and He longs to bestow good gifts upon each of His children. He is waiting to see which ones you and I will seek so we can use them to bless the lives of all around us.

It is my testimony that we can lay hold upon every good gift. It is my testimony that God delights to bless us. I testify that as we use our gifts to bless the lives of others, we will have the joy that comes from these beautiful gifts of God.