

***“By Small and Simple Things Are Great Things Brought to Pass”***

***(Alma 37:6-7)***

Elder David A. Bednar

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*This address was given Friday, April 29, 2011 at the BYU Women’s Conference*

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Susan and I are delighted to be with you today on the Brigham Young University campus. We are confident your experience this week has been both meaningful and memorable. We love you and we are grateful to worship with you today.

I pray that during our time together this afternoon the Holy Ghost will teach each of us the things that are needful for our individual lives and for our families.

In a revelation given through the Prophet Joseph Smith in June of 1831, the Lord declared, “I will give unto you a pattern in all things, that ye may not be deceived; for Satan is abroad in the land, and he goeth forth deceiving the nations” (D&C 52:14). I invite you to consider a specific phrase in this verse — “a pattern in all things.”

A pattern is a guide, a template, or a model. Patterns are used in sewing, in knitting, in wood- and metalworking, and in a wide variety of other productive pursuits, activities, and jobs. Patterns help to avoid waste and unwanted deviations and facilitate uniformity that is appropriate and beneficial. Imagine the difficulty of sewing a blouse or building a table without an appropriate pattern.

Vital spiritual patterns are evident in the life of the Savior, in the scriptures, and in the teachings of living prophets and apostles. These spiritual patterns are now and always have been important aids to discernment and sources of direction and protection for faithful Latter-day Saints. And as we just learned, spiritual patterns are essential in avoiding the deception that is so pervasive in our world today.

A powerful pattern the Lord uses to advance His work and to tutor Heavenly Father’s children upon the earth is the theme for this Women’s Conference—“by small and simple things are great things brought to pass” (Alma 37:6). Let me explain briefly what I mean.

Many people in our contemporary world are drawn to promises of big results that occur quickly and all at once. Consider, for example, all of the money spent on lottery tickets. Recall the claims of advertising messages you have received that pledge immediate weight loss, instant health, fast hair growth, and a more youthful appearance in just 14 days. We are bombarded

constantly with messages from a variety of sources promoting speedy supersizing, instant gratification, and outstanding performance that will impress our families and friends.

In a similar way, the adversary made impressive assertions about big results in premortality: “And I, the Lord God, spake unto Moses, saying: That Satan, whom thou hast commanded in the name of mine Only Begotten, is the same which was from the beginning, and he came before me, saying—Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor” (Moses 4:1). Lucifer’s grandiose pledge, however, was hollow and empty because he “sought to destroy the agency of man” (Moses 4:3).

In contrast to what we so often observe in the world, the Lord ministers “one by one” (3 Nephi 11:15). He enables us to learn “line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little” (2 Nephi 28:30). And He accomplishes His work by bringing to pass great things through small and simple means.

I believe many, if not all, of the most satisfying and memorable accomplishments in our homes, in the Church, in our jobs and professions, and in our communities will be the product of this important spiritual pattern—of simple and small things. We should find great comfort in the fact that ordinary people who faithfully, diligently, and consistently do simple things that are right before God will bring forth extraordinary results.

The following three examples illustrate this truth.

Example number one. Several years ago Elder L. Tom Perry described in a BYU devotional message the legacy of Gustavus Adolphus Perry, the first member of the Perry family to join The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (see “The Value of a Good Name,” in *Brigham Young University 1996-97 Speeches*, [1997], 179-85). Gustavus, his wife, Eunice, and their seven children lived on a beautiful farm in upstate New York. The Perry family first heard the message of the restored gospel in 1830 and was baptized in 1832. After joining the Church, the family moved from New York to Ohio, from Ohio to Missouri, from Missouri to Illinois, and from Illinois across the plains to the Great Salt Lake Valley. The town of Perry, Utah, is named after the oldest son of Gustavus and Eunice, the first bishop to serve in that community.

In 1997, the Perry family celebrated the 200th birthday of Gustavus Perry. In preparation for that celebration, Elder L. Tom Perry’s brother conducted extensive research and identified as many of the descendants of Gustavus and Eunice as he could.

In your mind now, please try to guess the number of descendants Elder Perry’s brother found. Don’t answer out loud, just have a number in your mind. Ready? The answer—more than 10,000 family members had come from this faithful man and woman.

Elder Perry stated in his devotional message: “The number overwhelmed me. I could not believe that there could be more than 10,000 descendants of Gustavus Adolphus Perry. . . . In seven to eight generations, his family had sufficient numbers to organize three stakes of [the Church]” (“The Value of a Good Name,” 180).

In this illustration we witness the power of a profound spiritual pattern—small and simple things bringing great things to pass. A faithful husband and wife did their best to rear children in

righteousness; testimony and deepening conversion to Christ persisted across the generations to grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and thousands more. Many seemingly ordinary family prayers, common experiences working together, gospel conversations, tragedies and triumphs, and meaningful Sabbath days in scores of families across the generations produced a legacy of faithfulness. By small and simple things are great things brought to pass.

Example number two. Luke Syphus and Christiana Long were born, respectively, in 1827 and 1832 and lived in England. Both Luke and Christiana received and studied the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and were baptized. Following their conversions, they met, courted, and were married on Christmas Day of 1851. And approximately one year after their marriage, they boarded the ship *Java* and set sail for Australia.

During the five-month voyage, Luke and Christiana became good friends with Joseph and Adelaide Ridges. The Ridges likewise were immigrating to Australia from their native country of England. When the ship arrived at its destination in April of 1853, the Syphus and Ridges families lived and worked together at Pennant Hills, approximately 15 miles northwest of Sydney.

Luke and Christiana introduced Joseph and Adelaide to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. During their journey from England, the Ridges had grown to admire Luke and Christiana for their good habits, for their kindly ways, and for their example of strength and devotion as Brother and Sister Syphus faced the heartache associated with the death of their firstborn child. Luke loaned Joseph a copy of the Book of Mormon and a text of the teachings of Elder Orson Pratt. Both Joseph and Adelaide ultimately became convinced of the truthfulness of the gospel and were baptized in 1853 (see “Pioneer Organ Builder’s Story,” *Deseret Evening News*, Feb. 16, 1901, 9).

As a child in England, Joseph Ridges had been fascinated by an organ factory near his home. He had spent long hours watching and learning how organs are constructed. In his spare time in Australia and using the skills he had developed in England, Joseph began to build a small, seven-stop pipe organ. The mission president, Augustus Farnham, suggested Brother Ridges donate the organ to the Church in Salt Lake City. Joseph agreed, and with the help of the members and missionaries he dismantled the organ, packed the parts into six large tin cases and stowed the instrument in the cargo hold of a sailing vessel, the *Jenny Lind*. A company of approximately 120 people set sail for Utah in 1856, including the Ridges and the Syphus families and the organ Joseph had constructed.

After landing in California, the organ was hauled across the desert by mule teams and arrived in Salt Lake City in June of 1857. Brother Ridges installed the small organ in the old adobe tabernacle on Temple Square, where the Assembly Hall now stands. That simple instrument was the forerunner of a great organ Brother Ridges later was to build.

Construction began in the 1860s on the Tabernacle that stands today on Temple Square. Brigham Young asked Joseph, who at the time was farming here in Provo, if he could build a large organ for the new building. Brother Ridges responded that he could, and the work began. Eventually the organ would have 2 manuals, 27 pedals, and 35 stops, with approximately 2,000 pipes—and would measure 20 feet by 30 feet by 40 feet. The organ took more than 10 years to construct.

Now again in this example we witness the power of a profound spiritual pattern—small and simple things bringing great things to pass. Acts of kindness, of righteous influence, and of Christian compassion by Luke and Christiana were instrumental in bringing to pass the conversions of Joseph and Adelaide. A small and simple organ in Australia helped to bring forth the great Tabernacle organ that today is one of the iconic symbols of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. No big results occurred quickly or all at once. Rather, by small and simple things great things were brought to pass.

Example number three. The lessons I learned from my great-great-grandfather, Luke Syphus, about the power of small and simple things in setting a righteous example came into greater focus for me in 1980 after completing my studies at Purdue University. Sister Bednar and I and our sons moved to Fayetteville, Arkansas. Susan and I were excited to learn if life truly existed after graduate school. We anticipated with great excitement the adventure of a new start for our family in a wonderful community.

One of our sons had a challenging learning experience at his elementary school one day as several children told him they could not play with him during recess because he was a Mormon and not a Christian. This little boy came home after school and asked why the other children had said such things and acted as they did. We simply told him that they did not know much about our beliefs and Church—and that he would have a terrific opportunity to be a missionary.

In the months and many years that followed, this son and his two brothers, along with a small number of other faithful Latter-day Saint youth who lived in the area, endeavored to be good examples as they participated in a wide range of school activities, countless athletic contests, and many community events. Our sons certainly were not perfect, as I previously have described in general conference. They were quite normal, fun-loving, and typically rambunctious boys. But our boys did strive to live the gospel and to be examples of the believers “in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12). They declined invitations to play on all-star athletic teams if Sunday practices and play were expected. And they did not participate in activities or events that would compromise their standards.

As these three young men progressed through both junior high and high school, Susan and I were intrigued to learn that the parents of our sons’ friends frequently would ask their children if the Bednar boys were going to attend a party or some other activity. Interestingly, if the answer were yes, then those parents would permit their children to attend. If the answer were no, then many parents often would not allow their children to participate. Oh how we continue to cherish the associations and friendships we developed with the parents of our sons’ friends—good and God-fearing men and women who were not and are not today members of our Church.

In 1997 we moved from Fayetteville to Rexburg, Idaho, so I could assume my new responsibilities as president of Ricks College, now Brigham Young University–Idaho. As we were preparing to relocate, I called upon and talked with a number of friends with whom we had associated for many years. I asked a favor of one good friend to whom I previously had given a copy of the Book of Mormon and with whom I had often talked about the Savior’s restored Church. I indicated to my friend that falsehoods about our Church and our beliefs often were promulgated in our community. He readily acknowledged that such things occurred. I then asked for his help. He responded that he gladly would be of assistance. I gave him a copy of Elder M. Russell Ballard’s book entitled *Our Search for Happiness: An Invitation to Understand The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* and requested that he read it. I explained to him

that since I would no longer be in a position to explain our beliefs and defend our Church, I needed him to do so. I invited him to become a defender of our faith in a community where Latter-day Saints often were maligned and mocked.

He scanned the table of contents of the book I had given him, he paused for a moment, and then he said sincerely, “Dave, I will.” And then he said, “We have been watching the LDS kids in the schools over the years, and we all know that you Latter-day Saints have something we do not have. I will do my best to help stop the falsehoods.”

Such a dramatic change of perspective in just a few short years—from an elementary school playground and the taunting of a little LDS boy because he allegedly was not a Christian to an acknowledgement by prominent parents in our community that “you Latter-day Saints have something we do not have.”

In this example we again witness the power of a profound spiritual pattern—small and simple things bringing great things to pass. A relative handful of young men and young women lived the gospel in small and simple and ordinary ways. On countless occasions when many other youth used coarse and inappropriate language, these faithful young disciples did not. On countless occasions when other youth engaged in improper or immoral behavior, these young disciples did not. On countless occasions when many other youth turned inward through self-centeredness and selfishness, these young disciples often turned outward with compassion and in service. No big results occurred quickly or all at once. Rather, by small and simple things great things were brought to pass.

I now invite you to reflect on two important questions related to the principles you have learned this week in your classes and your conversations:

1. Why do small and simple things bring great things to pass?
2. Why is the spiritual pattern of small and simple things bringing great things to pass so central to living the gospel of Jesus Christ with faith and diligence?

We can learn much about the nature and importance of this spiritual pattern from the technique of drip irrigation that is used in many gardens and in agricultural areas throughout the world. Drip irrigation is sometimes called trickle irrigation and involves dripping water onto the soil at very low rates from a system of small plastic pipes fitted with outlets called emitters or drippers. Unlike surface and sprinkler irrigation that involves flooding or gushing or spraying large quantities of water where it may not be needed, drip irrigation applies water close to a plant so that only part of the soil in which the roots grow is wetted.

With drip irrigation, applications of water are more focused and more frequent than with the other methods. The steady drips of water sink deep into the ground and provide a high moisture level in the soil wherein plants can flourish. In like manner, if you and I are focused and frequent in receiving consistent drops of spiritual nourishment, then gospel roots can sink deep into our soul, can become firmly established and grounded, and can produce extraordinary and delicious fruit.

The spiritual pattern of small and simple things bringing forth great things produces firmness and steadfastness, deepening devotion, and more complete conversion to the Lord Jesus Christ and His gospel. As you and I become increasingly steadfast and immovable, we are less prone to

zealous and exaggerated spurts of spirituality followed by extended periods of slackness. A spiritual “spurter” is one who is given to a short burst of spectacular effort followed by frequent and lengthy periods of rest.

A big spurt may appear to be impressive in the short run, but steadiness in small things over time is far more effective, far less dangerous, and produces far better results. Three consecutive days of fasting ultimately will not be as spiritually efficacious as three successive months of appropriate fasting and worship on the designated fast Sunday—of many small and simple things done consistently well. A great attempt to pray one time for five hours likely will not produce the spiritual results of meaningful morning and evening prayer offered consistently over five weeks or five months—of many small and simple things done consistently well. And a single, great scripture-reading marathon cannot produce the spiritual impact of steady scripture study across many months.

President Spencer W. Kimball taught about the importance of small and simple things in our spiritual development and progress. In explicating the parable of the ten virgins, he taught:

“The foolish [virgins] asked the others to share their oil, but spiritual preparedness cannot be shared in an instant. The wise had to go, else the bridegroom would have been unwelcomed. They needed all their oil for themselves; they could not save the foolish. The responsibility was each for himself.

“This was not selfishness or unkindness. The kind of oil that is needed to illuminate the way and light up the darkness is not shareable. How can one share obedience to the principle of tithing; a mind at peace from righteous living; an accumulation of knowledge? How can one share faith or testimony? How can one share attitudes or chastity, or the experience of a mission? How can one share temple privileges? Each must obtain that kind of oil for himself.”

President Kimball continued: “The foolish virgins were not averse to buying oil. They knew they should have oil. They merely procrastinated, not knowing when the bridegroom would come.

“In the parable, oil can be purchased at the market. In our lives the oil of preparedness is accumulated drop by drop in righteous living. Attendance at sacrament meetings adds oil to our lamps, drop by drop over the years. Fasting, family prayer, home teaching, control of bodily appetites, preaching the gospel, studying the scriptures—each act of dedication and obedience is a drop added to our store. Deeds of kindness, payment of offerings and tithes, chaste thoughts and actions, marriage in the covenant for eternity—these, too, contribute importantly to the oil with which we can at midnight refuel our exhausted lamps” (*Faith Precedes the Miracle* [1972], 255–56).

The key lesson for us to learn from the parable of the ten virgins is that deliberate and consistent preparation and performance provide essential oil for our lamps. “By small and simple things are great things brought to pass.”

Elder Neal A. Maxwell explained: “Measured steadiness is more efficient than spurts and then a slackening. Further, we are less apt to ‘wear away’ in prudent persistence than in a combination of breathlessness and ease. Sometimes we may reward our breathlessness with a respite that

turns into a permanent repose; we do this by reflecting on all that we have done up to now and how it is surely now someone else's turn" (*Wherefore, Ye Must Press Forward* [1977], 74).

In a gospel sense, you and I need to become intelligent drip irrigators and avoid sporadic and shallow spiritual spurting. We can avoid or overcome unsustainable spiritual spurting as we employ the Lord's pattern of small and simple things and become truly intelligent irrigators.

I conclude now where we began. The Lord declared in the early days of this dispensation, "I will give unto you a pattern in all things, that ye may not be deceived; for Satan is abroad in the land, and he goeth forth deceiving the nations" (D&C 52:14). In a world of increasing wickedness, in a world where good is called evil and evil is called good, in a world that puts darkness for light and light for darkness (see 2 Nephi 15:20), you can and will be blessed with "the hope of righteousness" (Galatians 5:5), "the light of the Lord" (Isaiah 2:5), and protection against deception (see 1 Nephi 15:24; Helaman 5:12).

As the Savior declared, "Wherefore, 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" (D&C 64:33; emphasis added).

And may we all ever remember the imagery suggested in the 123rd section of the Doctrine and Covenants: "You know, brethren, that a very large ship is benefited very much by a *very small helm* in the time of a storm, by being kept workways with the wind and the waves.

"Therefore, dearly beloved brethren, let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed" (verses 16–17; emphasis added).

I declare my apostolic witness that Jesus the Christ is the light and the life of the world. He lives; I know and witness He lives. I testify the fulness of His gospel has been restored to the earth in these latter days. And I further witness that He speaks and directs the affairs of His living and restored Church through His appointed and anointed servants.

I invoke the blessing upon you that, according to your desire, your faithfulness, and your diligence, you may have eyes to see and the capacity to press forward and persevere in the powerful spiritual pattern of small and simple things bringing to pass great things—in your individual lives, in your families, and in your righteous pursuits. Of these things I testify and these blessings I invoke upon you in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.