

God's Greatest Gifts
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"Stand Forever" Episode 5

Hello, my name is Larry Corbridge, and this is the *Stand Forever Series*. This is episode 5, "*God's Greatest Gifts*."

In the last episode, we discussed ABC, which is a central message of the Old Testament and what God taught Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and His children through all time:

- A. **Only God can bless you;** only He can cause your heart to beat and give you breath; only He can preserve and protect you; only He can give you strength to bear up the burdens of life; only He can give you power, knowledge, peace and joy; only He can forgive your sins; only He can heal you; only He can change you and forge a godly soul; only He can bring you back into His presence; only He can bless you.
- B. **He will do all of that and much more if you remember Him to keep His commandments.**
- C. **Therefore, remember Him to keep His commandments. It is the only intelligent thing to do.**

From the beginning of time, God has repeatedly invited His children to trust Him, not *instead* of everyone and everything else but *above* anyone or anything else.

We also observed a critical problem: we don't keep God's commandments all the time, and the consequences of disobedience are severe and immutable. We make mistakes, and when we do, we suffer. Worst of all, we may withdraw ourselves from the Spirit of the Lord, which is God's presence in this world.¹ And before we know it, we are left unto ourselves, separated from God and His power.² As I said before, that is what King Benjamin characterized as our "awful situation."³ It is the worst of all, the essential problem in life.

The essential problem in life is separation from God our Father. Without God chaos, darkness, and death prevail. But, before we can understand the worst, chaos,

¹ Mosiah 2:36, 37

² Doctrine and Covenants 121:36, 37

³ Mosiah 2:40

darkness, and death, we must first understand the best, God's greatest blessings, the greatest gifts He offers to His obedient children. This is because, without those gifts, only the natural state remains—chaos, darkness, and death prevail.

The Saddest Story Ever Told

There once was a good and very wise father. He loved his many children more than anyone has ever loved children. Everything he did was for them. Because of his great love and wisdom, he sent his children away from home when they were old enough and sufficiently prepared to learn on their own. He gave them many marvelous and unique gifts, masterfully prepared for their growth and development away from home. All the father's gifts were truly extraordinary, carefully, and painstakingly prepared by him, but three were the greatest. They were the spring from which flowed all the others.

Although the gifts were many, they all had one thing in common; they were designed to invariably endow his children with power and joy. But here the story takes an awful turn. What should have been the greatest story ever told, became the most tragic, because most of the children ignored their father's marvelous gifts.

They were dazzled by the cheap tinsel and glitz of the world away from home rather than the priceless gifts of their amazing father. By rejecting the gifts of their father, the children rejected him. The father was profoundly hurt, more than we can imagine, and his foolish children were weak and miserable having refused or neglected the very gifts that would have brought power and enduring joy. And that may or may not be the end of the story.

Your Eternal Father loves you more than anyone has ever loved another. All He does is for you and His children. He offers you and all His children everywhere supernal gifts, but most of His children neither receive nor rejoice in His marvelous gifts, and as a result they are weak and unhappy and heaven weeps with them.

Can you imagine the sadness and disappointment of Our Father if we do not accept His magnificent gifts, when His children ignore Him after all He has done? Enoch saw that not only Heavenly Father but the whole of the heavens weep when we refuse or neglect His gifts.⁴

⁴ Moses 7:28-38

In light of the great gifts our Father offers and the inconceivably high price paid to make them available, some of the saddest words in all of scripture are these: **“For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift? Behold, he rejoices not in that which is given unto him, neither rejoices in him who is the giver of the gift.”**⁵

God’s Greatest Blessings

What are the greatest gifts our Father offers all His children everywhere from the beginning of time? **His Son, His Spirit, and His life.** Those are God’s greatest gifts to His children. To accept and receive those gifts is the best of all human conditions. What is the inconceivably high price paid to make them available? The creation, the fall, the Atonement of Jesus Christ and all the Gods have done and do “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”⁶

The Gift of God’s Son

“(I)n the gift of his Son hath God prepared a more excellent way.”⁷

Words cannot describe, nor can we conceive or measure the height, the breadth, and the depth of the gift of God’s own Son. “No tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive (anything) so great and marvelous”⁸ as Jesus Christ, the Son of God by whom salvation and all good things are possible.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”⁹

To contemplate the magnitude of the gift of God’s Son, we need only think of Abraham and Isaac.

Can there be anything more horrific and repugnant, more unthinkable than a parent who either takes the life of his own child or stands by and allows it to happen? Occasionally, we hear of such reports, and our heads spin in disbelief and revulsion. Usually, such cases involve impairment. Otherwise how could any parent conceive,

⁵ Doctrine and Covenants 88:33

⁶ Moses 1:39

⁷ Ether 12:11

⁸ 3 Nephi 17:17

⁹ John 3:16,17

much less commit, such a heinous, indescribably depraved act? And then we have Abraham.

Many of us struggle with the events that led Abraham to place his beloved son Isaac on an altar and raise his knife, only to be stopped by an angel of God. How could he do that? While we are relieved by the saving intervention at the last moment, we remain troubled because of what was required of Abraham and his willingness to do it. We admire obedience at any cost, but we remain unsettled by the terrible price that was asked in the first place. Even understanding that Abraham learned something about Abraham, even recognizing he demonstrated he would not withhold anything from God, not even his son, we are troubled and find it hard to understand. But maybe that's the point. Maybe the abhorrence parts the veil ever so slightly on the horror of Gethsemane, and we glimpse the awful choice another Father and another Son had to make when there was no intervention for them.

Maybe Abraham is a bridge. At a distance, we may understand the history of God not sparing His Son, but not really relate emotionally, thinking such things are the things of gods. "And when (we) think that God, his Son not sparing, sent him to die, (we) scarce can take it in."¹⁰ But when we think of Abraham, we take it in, if we dare.

We can relate to Abraham, if not on the level of his obedience, at least on the level of his abhorrence and horror. We can imagine his revulsion, pain and anguish, the depth of his sorrow, offering his own son, his son of miraculous birth, his own child as a sacrifice! And, well, we should revolt, and our sensibilities cry out with offense because just then we may feel a trace of the revulsion and offense suffered by both Father and Son who did not shrink from those terrible and triumphant, redeeming hours. Feeling for Abraham and Isaac, we may begin to feel for God Our Father and Jesus Christ, His Son.

If the heavens weep over the "wickedness" of God's children,¹¹ imagine the tears that flowed when God did not spare His Only Begotten and innocent Son. Were you there? Did you know? Did you weep?

Abraham is a bridge to a Son "whose will was swallowed up in the will of the Father."¹² Abraham is a bridge to the broken heart, and the love of a Father not only for His Son, but for all of His children. You see, He is not only Christ's Father, He is Our Father too.

¹⁰ Stuart K. Hine, "How Great Thou Art," (Hymn #86)

¹¹ Moses 7:26-37

¹² Mosiah 15:7

Were it not for the gift of His Son, all other good gifts would be foreclosed and out of reach (the gift of God's Spirit, the gift of knowledge, and the gift of life because of Christ's Resurrection and Atonement). He is as He said, "the door"¹³ to every other good gift. If you want anything else worth having, you have to go through the Door.

The Gift of God's Spirit

Heavenly Father's greatest gift is the gift of life in all its dimensions. It is physical life, spiritual life, and especially eternal life.¹⁴ You might think everyone whose heart beats accepts and rejoices in the gift of life, but not so, because there is a big difference between existing and living.

Nothing in this life is of greater worth than the supernal gift of the Holy Ghost, the fountain of spiritual life. It is the source of joy, happiness, peace, knowledge, strength, guidance, confidence, love, and every other good thing. It is the power by which we may be changed and made strong wherein we are weak. It is the Holy Spirit of Promise, the power by which marriages and families are bound together eternally.¹⁵ It is the power by which the Lord makes Himself manifest to those who believe in Him.¹⁶

"Therefore it is given to abide in you; the record of heaven; the Comforter; the peaceable things of immortal glory; the truth of all things; that which quickeneth all things, which maketh alive all things; that which knoweth all things, and hath all power according to wisdom, mercy, truth, justice, and judgment."¹⁷

President Dallin H. Oaks taught: "By participating weekly and appropriately in the ordinance of the sacrament we qualify for the promise that we will 'always have his Spirit to be with [us]' (D&C 20:77). That Spirit is the foundation of our testimony. It testifies of the Father and the Son, brings all things to our remembrance, and leads us into truth. It is the compass to guide us on our path. This gift of the Holy Ghost, President Wilford Woodruff taught, 'is the greatest gift that can be bestowed upon man.'"¹⁸

Elder Bruce R. McConkie said: "Men ought-above all things in this world-to seek for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. There is nothing as important as having the

¹³ John 10:7, 9

¹⁴ Doctrine and Covenants 14:7

¹⁵ Doctrine and Covenants 132:7

¹⁶ 2 Nephi 26:13

¹⁷ Moses 6:61

¹⁸ Elder Dallin H. Oaks, General Conference, October 2008; President Wilford Woodruff, *Deseret Weekly*, Apr. 6, 1889, 451

companionship of the Holy Ghost ... There is no price too high, no labor too onerous, no struggle too severe, no sacrifice too great, if out of it all, we receive and enjoy the gift of the Holy Ghost."¹⁹

When asked by Martin Van Buren, then the president of the United States, how "Mormonism" differed from other religions of the day, the Prophet Joseph Smith is reported to have said, "We (differ) in mode of baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands." All other considerations, he said, are "contained in the gift of the Holy Ghost."²⁰

Jesus said to His disciples, "If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray **the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever:** Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."²¹

He continued, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, **whom the Father will send in my name,** he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."²² On the same occasion, the Lord said further: "But when the Comforter is come, whom **I will send unto you from the Father,** even the Spirit of truth, **which proceedeth from the Father,** he shall testify of me."²³

The gift of the Holy Ghost is never earned. We are never entitled to it. It is always a gift. We can't have it on our own because of our mistakes. When Jesus appeared to His disciples including Thomas, He said, "Peace be unto you: As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost."²⁴ They were worthy then, but they did not receive it until it was given on the Day of Pentecost.

Our transgressions cut us off from the presence and power of God. But even with the gift of God's Son, the gift of His Atonement, even with redemption and worthiness, and even with obedience to the commandments of God, the gift of the Holy Ghost is still a gift from Heavenly Father. It is not something we earn. The phrase is so common we gloss over the "gift" part. It is always a gift.

¹⁹ Elder Bruce R. McConkie, "A New Witness for the Articles of Faith," p. 28

²⁰ History of the Church, 4:42

²¹ John 14:15-17

²² John 14:26

²³ John 15:26

²⁴ John 20:21, 22

Every good thing depends on getting and keeping the power of the Holy Ghost in our lives. Everything depends on that.

The Gift of God's Life

While God's Spirit is the greatest gift in this life, in the grand scheme of things "eternal life ... is the greatest of all the gifts of God."²⁵ God's work and glory is to "bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."²⁶

Job asked, "If a man die, shall he live again?"²⁷ The answer is "yes," but the next important question is "Where and in what conditions?"

Most of what has been revealed about eternal life is about how to get there rather than what to expect when we do. That may seem odd at first blush, but on further reflection, we shouldn't be surprised. "The glory of the telestial ... surpasses all understanding ... And ... the glory of the terrestrial ... excels in all things the glory of the telestial, even in glory, and in power, and in might and in dominion ... And ... the glory of the celestial ... excels in all things—where God, even the Father reigns upon his throne forever and ever."²⁸ If the glory of the telestial surpasses all understanding, how can we expect to conceive, much less describe, greater things?

The rich man asked, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?"²⁹ On another occasion, "a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"³⁰ The wonder is, given we don't comprehend eternal life, no one asks "What is it?" rather the question is always, "What must I do to get there?" While we do not comprehend it, eternal life is a given. Despite its' mystery, its' reality and anticipation are largely unquestioned, implanted in the hearts of God's children.

Eternal life is the quality of life that our Eternal Father lives. It is the alternative to spiritual death; it is life eternally. "Whosoever believeth in him [Christ] **should not perish**, but have eternal life."³¹ It is more than immortality, more than perpetual

²⁵ Doctrine and Covenants 14:7

²⁶ Moses 1:39

²⁷ Job 14:14

²⁸ Doctrine and Covenants 76:89-92

²⁹ Matthew 19:16

³⁰ Luke 10:25

³¹ John 3:15, *emphasis added*

existence. Jacob said: "Remember, to be carnally-minded is death, and to be spiritually-minded is life eternal." The Spirit of God is life and God's presence on earth.³² Eternal life is a fulness of that life forever.

We also know "that the same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy."³³

Jesus prayed saying, "and this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."³⁴ A fulness of joy is everlasting life in the society of God. It is to know them as we know one another. It is to be fit for their presence, to be like them and see them as they are.³⁵

An integral part of "eternal life" is the continuation of family life and the power of procreation throughout eternity.³⁶ Family is not a mortal convention; it is not a lower law rather the pattern of heaven. Jesus said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as **your Father** which is in heaven is perfect."³⁷ **The standard, the model, is a not only perfection but also parenthood.** Be like your Father.

And so, what is He like? He is first and foremost a parent, a very good parent, a perfect father, an eternal father. If we learn enough about being a good spouse and parent while here, we will be permitted to live as husband and wife, father and mother, throughout eternity, as Eternal Fathers and Mothers. Family is the pattern of heaven.

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin taught:

What is the work and glory of God? "To bring to pass the *immortality* and *eternal life* of man" (Moses 1:39; emphasis added). I will explain the difference between these two ends: immortality and eternal life.

Bringing to pass immortality is essentially a work of creation. God speaks, and worlds are formed. At the culmination of this work, man is placed upon the earth to learn, be tested, and gain experience.

Because of the sacrifice of the Son of God, the hour will come when "all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done

³² Romans 8:10

³³ Doctrine and Covenants 130:2

³⁴ John 17:3

³⁵ 1 John 3:2

³⁶ Doctrine and Covenants 132:19, 20, 24, 55

³⁷ Matthew 5:48, *emphasis added*

good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:28–29).

The just as well as the unjust are given a priceless and incomprehensible gift: immortality. Because of Jesus the Christ, we will live forever. We are immortal.

Eternal life, however, is something altogether different. Immortality is about quantity. Eternal life is about quality.

To use a metaphor, immortality is how long the dinner lasts. Eternal life is what is on the menu and who is with us at the table ... If immortality is God's work, then eternal life is God's glory."³⁸

Immortality and eternal life are inextricably linked together, quantity coupled with quality, not one without the other. Elder Ezra Taft Benson said, "Yes, life is eternal. We live on and on after earth-life, even though we oftentimes lose sight of that great basic truth."³⁹ It is a great truth! And, "what are threescore and ten years on earth to all eternity with God?"⁴⁰

Eternal life is to return to our Father in the fulness of His glory and live as He lives, forever. It is to return home for good.

God's Greatest Gifts: His Son, His Spirit, and His Life

God's greatest gifts offered to all His children everywhere from the beginning of time are the gifts of **His Son, His Spirit, and His life**. They constitute the best of all human conditions. Without God and His supernal gifts only the natural state remains—chaos, darkness, and death. They constitute the worst of all human conditions. We will explore those conditions in greater depth in the next episodes. **The essential problem in life is separation from God our Father and His great gifts.**

³⁸ Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, "What is the Difference between Immortality and Eternal Life," New Era, November 2006

³⁹ Elder Ezra Taft Benson, *Life is Eternal*, General Conference, April 1971

⁴⁰ Lew Wallace, *Ben Hur*, 446