

Forgiveness

By Alisa Buxton
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Good morning. When we got up this morning, as we had turned our clocks forward an hour last night for Daylight Savings Time, my little boy asked us “Since we lose an hour today, does that mean we lose an hour of church?” I said, “No, we get to go to all of church today.”

It’s good to be here today and to partake of the sacrament.

President Monson tells a story about how one night, years ago, he was on his way home and approaching the entrance to the freeway. He noticed three hitchhikers. Each carried a sign that announced his destination. The first sign read “Los Angeles”, the second sign read “Idaho”. But the third sign caught his attention the most. On the piece of cardboard was simply written “ANYWHERE”.

Here was a man who was content to travel in any direction, at the mercy of the driver who stopped to give him a free ride. What an enormous price to pay for such a ride! No plan. No objective. No goal. The road to anywhere is the road to nowhere.

Unlike the hitchhiker, you and I have the God-given gift to choose the direction we should go. Every so often it’s good to ask, “Where am I going? How do I intend to get there? And what is my divine destiny?” When we ask ourselves these questions we may find that we are not on the right road and some changes need to be made.

I was asked to speak today on forgiveness of oneself. Forgiveness follows repentance. Repentance is a change of mind, prompted by a change of heart, resulting in a change of life.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said, “The very beauty of the word repentance is the promise of escaping old problems, old habits, old sorrows and old sins. It is among the most hopeful, encouraging and peaceful words in the gospel vocabulary. In seeking true peace, some of us need to improve what has to be improved, confess what needs to be confessed and forgive what has to be forgiven in order that serenity can come to us. If there is a commandment we are breaking, and as a result it is breaking us, let us call down the power of the Lord Jesus Christ to help us, free us, to lead us thru repentance.”

Elder Holland goes on to say, “And when God has forgiven us, which He is so eternally anxious to do, may we have the good sense to walk away from those problems, to leave them alone, to let the past bury the past. If one of you has made a mistake, even a serious mistake, but you have done all you can according to the teaching of the Lord and the governance of the Church to confess it and feel sorrow for it and set as right as can be, then trust in God, walk into His light and leave those ashes behind you.”

I remember when my youngest son Andrew turned 5 and started kindergarten. He loved school! Every day he was so excited to get his backpack and head out the door. Well...the weeks and months went by. One day I was watching him try to put his backpack on. He was grunting and groaning and trying to lift the heavy thing onto his back. I said, “Why is your backpack so heavy? What is in there?” I looked inside to see what was making the bag so heavy. I found piles of rocks! Big ones, small ones, clean ones, dirty ones, smooth ones and sparkly ones! I asked him why he had so many rocks and where they came from? He told me that every day when he goes out to recess he picks a rock and then brings it home. He said he was keeping those rocks and wanted to keep them all in his backpack.

As we looked through and counted them we found that there were over 40 rocks. I felt bad knowing that my little boy was carrying such a load to and from school every day. We agreed that leaving his new collection at home in a box would be a good solution. We unloaded the bag and he was amazed at how much lighter he felt! I remember him saying, “I wish I would’ve done that a long time ago.”

Jesus said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

None of us is perfect. We all make mistakes. We all at some time or another have been troubled by transgression and the temptation of transgression. But the message is the same for all of us, come unto Him and lay down your burden. Sin is heavy! Nothing is more burdensome than sin.

Elder Richard G. Scott describes sin like a cancer in the body. It will never heal itself. It will become progressively worse unless cured through the medicine of repentance. (Elder Richard G. Scott, “Trust in the Lord,” *Ensign*, May, 1989.)

Our Father doesn’t want to see us struggle with a backpack full of rocks, picking it up and carrying it along with us **every day**. We don’t have to. He sent His son, our Savior and Redeemer.

In Mosiah we read that Christ has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows and with his stripes we are healed. (Mosiah 14:4-5) The heavy feelings of pain, guilt and shame will be replaced with joy and peace. Let Him lift the load! Let Him give you peace! Then we too can say, “I wish I would I have done that a long time ago.”

Last year when the boundaries changed and we came to join the DC 2nd ward, I was given a new calling in Relief Society—a place that I have never been before! I have always been serving somewhere else in the church and so I didn’t know a lot about Relief Society. I know the church has awesome “young” women, but in reading and learning I also have found that Relief Society women, both past and present, are pretty amazing too.

Over the years, Relief Society sisters have had many projects, from canning and quilting to macramé and tole painting. I remember my mom doing some of those. I came across an article that was published in the newspaper back in 1920.

This Relief Society project was called “Swat the Fly” campaign. Flies were swatted, collected in fruit jars and then buried. Can you imagine if our next Relief Society activity was collecting flies!

The article said this: “Kill the Winter Flies! The coming of the cold weather has driven the flies into the house and under cover. Most of last season’s flies, having completed their life cycle are dead; but those hatched late have laid their eggs in a favorable place for incubation in the early spring and will survive the winter unless disposed of.

At the first approach of cold weather, the flies seek warmth and protection in houses and stables. They hide in nooks and corners. Keep them out. If any succeed in getting in, kill them. Swat every one that shows itself and be sure to burn their bodies.

Clean up the house and give special attention to every out-of-the way place where flies may lurk. Make sure there is nothing left which may harbor their eggs. One fly that survives the winter, will become the parent of hundreds of millions next summer.”

We know that a common house fly is a filthy, dirty insect that carries disease from one place to another—a small nuisance that is usually shooed away, not given any particular attention. But did you know that a common female house fly lays 150 tiny white eggs at a time. She lives for only about two months but can lay up to 1,000 eggs in her short life, passing on generations of flies to pass disease long after she is gone.

That article inspires me to clean my house like crazy, every nook and cranny, but it also is a reminder to us to carefully look at what “flies” are infesting our heart and spirit too. And, if given any warmth and attention, they too will hatch.

Elder Holland said, “I invite you to join me in regularly turning inward to confront there *anything* we wouldn't want others to see. Make those changes necessary that allow us to hold up a brighter candle, a purer light.” (Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, *Broken Things to Mend*, Deseret Book, 2008)

Each week we have that opportunity to do what Elder Holland suggested, to regularly turn inward and take a look. We do that when we partake of the sacrament. We did just moments ago. When we came here today to Sacrament meeting were we prepared to repent? Prepared to get rid of

those flies that may be buzzing around so others don't multiply? To place our sins upon the sacrament table, to renew our covenants and be forgiven? And to walk away from this meeting..... clean!

Now that we have focused on repentance what follows is forgiveness. Forgiveness will come when you have followed the requirements of repentance such as seeking forgiveness, feeling sorrow for the sin, keeping the commandments, repairing the wrong as much as possible, and giving up and confessing the sin.

How do we know if we have truly repented and are forgiven?

The answer is through the Holy Ghost. Through the Spirit, you can know that the Lord has forgiven you. We know from the scriptures that the Spirit doesn't dwell in an unclean tabernacle. (Mosiah 2:37).

Alma described feeling forgiveness in this way: "After wading through much tribulation, repenting nigh unto death, the Lord, in mercy hath seen fit to snatch me out of an everlasting burning, and I am born of God. My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God. My soul was racked with eternal torment; but I am snatched, and my soul is pained no more." (Mosiah 27:28-29)

The hymn "How Gentle God's Commands" describes forgiveness as "sweet refreshment." Elder Howard of the Seventy said, "When you have fully repented, you feel an inner peace. You know somehow you are forgiven because the burden you have carried for so long, all of a sudden isn't there anymore. It is gone and you know it is gone...If you have fully repented, the relief and the peace you feel will be so noticeable that it will be a witness to you that the Lord has forgiven you."

If you're still not sure you have been forgiven, it may be you haven't fully repented, or maybe the Lord has forgiven you, but you haven't forgiven yourself. No one can beat us up better than we can beat ourselves up! Satan will lead us to believe that we don't deserve to be forgiven. He would convince us that we are defined by our sins and we may be tempted to judge ourselves too harshly. We should be careful not to dwell on our transgressions and mistakes; remembering the details increases the danger of repeating them.

If you are struggling to forgive yourself, remember the Lord's promise: "He who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more" (D&C 58:42). Once forgiven, you are free from that sin and should forgive yourself. Hanging on to the guilt after the Lord has forgiven you is like denying that the Atonement is working in your life.

Forgiving yourself doesn't mean you forget the sin and the pain it caused. Satan will try to make us believe that our sins are not forgiven because we can remember them. Satan is a liar! He tries to lead us away from the path of repentance and forgiveness. God did not promise us that we would not remember our sins. Remembering will help us prevent future sin. But if we stay true and faithful, the memory of our sins will be softened over time. This is part of the healing process. Alma testified that after he cried out to Jesus for mercy, he could still remember his sins, but the memory no longer distressed and tortured him, because he knew he had been forgiven. (Alma 36:17-19)

When we turn to our Savior, He can heal us not only of the sin but also of the feelings of self-doubt and failure, the constant mental replaying of our sins or obsessing over them. Holding on to the rocks in our backpack only weighs us down. In the repentance process, forgiving ourselves may be like giving up the last rock in our backpack. It might be the hardest rock to give up. But when we turn the sin and the guilt over to the Savior we will experience a change in how we see ourselves. We will be free to feel the love of our Heavenly Father, our love for Him and the joy of the Atonement!

We need not wait to partake of the Atonement. "Come unto me" means now! Not when we feel "worthy enough" or perfect enough or clean enough. It means today, right now—with all our imperfections and shortcomings.

Brian and I visited Israel with my family a few years ago. In preparation for that trip we met and studied some of the places we would visit. I was so drawn to the story about the man at the pool of Bethesda that I studied that one. I was excited to learn about a magical pool of water that when

angels touch it, it heals. I studied it before we went and it's a good thing I did. I learned so much! And I learned it wasn't a story about a magical pool of water.

It is about a pool of water called Bethesda. (John 5:2-9) The pool Bethesda meaning mercy. There were many ill or impotent people lying about the pool waiting. Waiting because it was believed that when the pool of water was troubled, or moved, that an angel had touched it. The first to step into it would be healed.

The story goes on to tell of a man who had an infirmity for thirty eight years. He was lying by the pool, watching and waiting. The scriptures then say Jesus saw the man and knew that he had been sick for a long time. Jesus said to him, "Wilt thou be made whole?" The man answered saying, "I have no man...to put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me."

Jesus then said, "Rise, take up thy bed and walk." And immediately the man was made whole.

We can learn so much from this story! First, how could those who were impotent step into the pool? They could not, due to their ailments. So...picture this great multitude of people, sick ones, lying around this disappointing pool, when all along the Healer Himself was abroad in the land! The pool of Bethesda surrounded each day but Christ himself nearby unheeded!

Is it any different today? Do we look everywhere for comfort, healing, peace and acceptance except the place we are sure to find it? We are told that when Jesus came to the pool He saw the man and knew of his afflictions. The Savior knows each of us, knows of our afflictions and burdens. Then, it was not the man who spoke first, it was Jesus asking, "Wilt thou be made whole?"

The man at the pool failed to realize that Christ could cure him. He thought only of the pool and someone to help him to it.

Through this miracle we learn that Christ stands at the door and knocks. We must open the door. When we do we will find that by Him and through Him is the way back home. Through Him is healing and forgiveness.

I want to bear my testimony to you that I am so grateful for the Atonement that was given to us that we may repent and be forgiven. My little boy said to me this week "How come parents don't ever make mistakes? How come it's just us kids?" But parents do make mistakes. We all do.

I have a testimony of this gospel and of the church and am so grateful for it in my life. For the testimony I have of the restoration of the gospel and for Joseph Smith and his good example and for our Savior, Jesus Christ, for his life and His example—for the miracle He came and performed while He was here.

I'm thankful for my family and love them so much.

I leave this with you in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.