

May Week #4 Devotionals & Consideration



Your Covenant Walk—Making a Plan for Accountability

It seems clear from God's promises, and the testimonies that confirm them, that living in Covenant is the best possible choice for a fulfilling life.

I challenge you to write out the things you do or have done that help you keep your Covenant.

List the blessings you've had in your life because of these commitments to your Covenant.

My list will be different than yours, but I'll share a portion of my list here, those things that have blessed me the most, to give you ideas:

1. Study the Scriptures and attend classes:

D&C 85:36a Therefore, verily I say unto you, my friends, Call your solemn assembly, as I have commanded you; and as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning even by study, and also by faith.

As many of you may have experienced, reading the Scriptures can be difficult when you are young.

I was blessed to have a Mom that taught us from the Scriptures daily and developed a strong Sunday School program in our congregation.

As I reached my teen years, this habit carried me through the division that occurred in the Church, and the questioning that many around me were going through.

In my sixteenth year (1984, Junior in high school), the habit of searching the Scriptures kept me grounded.

I read the Doctrine and Covenants that year. Over and over again I felt the "ring of truth" in its words. This confirmed to me that God speaks to His people today and that Joseph Smith was a prophet. Section after section confirmed this to me, not in every single section, but in most.

Then, after several months I noticed that I wasn't sensing God's Spirit or the same ring of truth anymore. I was in Section 149. I flipped back a few sections to see where it was that I stopped feeling the Holy Spirit's power and it was at Section 144. My belief was that the latter leaders of the Church really weren't following God's will for the Church.

All of this happened without me discussing it with any adults, and since I lived in Texas, not in the Center Place, I wasn't privy to many of the persecutions and conversations that were going on.

Eight years later I learned that many of the “Restorationists” believe that Section 144 was the last divine revelation given.

This was amazingly confirming to me. God had truly directed my heart and not only my heart, but my future choices and the choices that would affect my family.

Who knows what direction my life would have taken if I had not developed that habit of studying my Scriptures?

2 Nephi 14:4 Feast upon the words of Christ; for behold the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.

2. Listen to the testimonies.

John 6:44 No man can come unto Me, except he doeth the will of My Father who hath sent Me. And this is the will of Him who hath sent Me, that ye receive the Son; for the Father beareth record of him; and he who receiveth the testimony, and doeth the will of Him who sent Me, I will raise up in the resurrection of the just.

When you think of testimonies, do you think of Wednesday evening services? This is, of course, a wonderful place to hear testimonies, but certainly not the only place.

In my life, the most powerful testimonies I remember came from two sources—one was hearing my extended family talk about their testimonies at family gatherings.

When many families were playing games or throwing the football around, my brother and cousins and I were hearing about God changing lives.

In addition to this, we often had missionaries and other out of town visitors in our home.

The testimonies I heard from Neil Steady, Neil Simmons, Frank Fry and others, professed that God was healing, speaking in tongues, casting out evil spirits and sending heavenly messengers to teach his servants.

I certainly can't leave out the testimonies I heard at reunions. The way these testimonies strengthened my faith is hard to express in writing.

D&C 6:14c But if they reject not My words, which shall be established by the testimony which shall be given blessed are they; and then shall ye have joy in the fruit of your labors.

With the many resources we have today on Restoration websites, as well as CD's, sermons on the internet and written materials, I challenge each of us to take advantage of testimonies for strengthening our faith.

Obviously OGRB's Zion's Call is one we have right here close to home. In turn you can share these testimonies with others at appropriate times.

3. Learn praise songs, hymns and other Scripture songs by heart.

Songs that have been committed to memory can bring such great blessing on those days when you're low and may not have the brain power to read God's word for strength.

I think it's important to note that the resonance of sound waves pierces the spirit in a very physical way that even reading the Word of God doesn't do.

In my experience, the physical and spiritual blessings of God's music at the moment it is needed is both healing and encouraging.

I might add that committing songs to memory is handy for the times

when you can't stop and read, don't have a song book or recorded music along with you, or might even be stranded on a deserted island.

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

The next step, in my opinion, is to apply what I have learned from the songs, as referenced in the Scripture above, because obedience brings enlightenment that strengthens faith.

I have a testimony about the combined power of music and God's Word. Though this happened when my children were small, it has been confirmed to me again in recent months.

When my children were young we always kept Christian cassette tapes in the car, listening to them frequently.

One afternoon as I was driving north on Buckner-Tarsney by myself, I was singing along with a Steve Green children's tape. I had been singing along with several songs. Suddenly one of the last songs on the tape came on and moved me to tears to such a great extent that I had to pull the van over to the side of the road.

I continued singing with joyful tears rolling down my face.

When the song ended, I wondered, "Why is this song causing me to feel such a great amount of God's joyful spirit, when all the songs on the tape are Christian?" I picked up the cassette case and pulled out the cover paper which contained the lyrics of each song.

All of the songs' lyrics were based on Christian concepts. However,

I noticed that the song that overwhelmed me was a literal Scripture found in Revelation.

This song was the Word of God.

I felt assured that the difference was in the literal power of God's word.

Since then, I have testified of the power and the healing, life-giving ministry to be given and enjoyed by Scripture songs.

Psalms 119:54 Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.

4. Choose to forgive others and self.

This Covenant principle of forgiveness is covered at length throughout the Scriptures, beginning with the forgiveness we each find in our Messiah.

Reading the stories of the Prodigal Son, Joseph of Egypt, Alma the younger, and the well-known Corrie Ten Boon blesses me because I am freed of burden as I forgive, as is the person that is forgiven.

I am sensing that the challenge to write out your Covenant habits may be sounding like a list of do's and don'ts.

Right now I feel that God wants each of us to pause and realize that keeping Covenant should not be about a list of do's and don'ts.

God wants it to come from the heart, like Jonathan's Covenant with David.

From our first week's devotions, remember that the Scriptures tell us that Jonathan loved David as his own soul. Keeping the Covenant he made with David was not a burden.

Likewise, if we love God the commandments should not be a burden.

1 John 5:3-5 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God.

In case you haven't noticed, each of the examples I shared about having kept my Covenant, all had the same outcome in my life. They each strengthened my faith.

I certainly can testify that on the occasions when my heart has been softened by God's Spirit, obeying His commandments have not been grievous, but were my heart's desire.

I hope that as you finish writing your blessings from Covenant living, your faith will be strengthened and give you a renewed spirit for this next challenge:

Next, I'd like you to write out the areas where you feel your Covenant needs strengthening—the areas where you are weakest.

As you look into your heart and your living habits, what do you see that should be changed, not only to bless you, but to bless others?

For me, I believe that many see a Jill that is "on her best behavior" in front of acquaintances. Not that I am fake. Maybe I just find it easier to do the "right" thing in public.

Maybe there are fewer challenges with people I don't know as well. However, the old saying, "How

you act when no one is watching, shows who you really are," speaks the truth.

In other words, who you are in private shows your true character and condition of your heart.

This poem was written by my great uncle, Patriarch Bill Dollins, and helps us to reflect on who we really are:

THE WITNESS

**In fancy I stood at the Judgment Day
before the throne of Grace;
Jesus was looking straight at me,
With a kindly loving face.**

**"I'll not judge," he said,
"By what others say,
Not even the best who passed your way.
The witness you will hear today
Will know how you ran the race."**

**A quiet hush fell over the crowd.
Their expressions I can't erase;
I remember seeing Peter and Paul,
And others I couldn't place.**

**"Who is this," I cried aloud.
"What witness with the truth endowed
Can testify to this great crowd
Of how I ran the race?"**

**I heard the voice of Jesus call
In tones so soft and clear,
As I wondered deep within my soul
What witness would be here?**

**Suddenly I felt so small;
O'er all of me there came a pall.
The witness summoned was
My home wall!"
A witness I would fear.**

**"What of this man have you to say?
How did he treat his wife?
Your testimony will be right,
For you observed his life.**

**Just bear your witness, come what may,
You're under oath so please obey.
Let friendship not stand in your way
Although your words bring strife."**

The WITNESS (continued)

**In solemn tone spoke the wall
of my home
And with a trace of sadness,
The words sank deep within my soul
And drove me near to madness.**

**“This man did many a time bemoan
And sigh and cry, complain and groan,
And made his wife feel so alone
And seldom brought her gladness.”**

**The Master set his gaze on me,
He knew I'd not deny
The testimony of the wall;
Remorse was my reply.**

**What better witness could there be,
Than friendly walls that really see,
And saw the true, unguarded me?
I bowed my head to cry.**

What does your home wall see?
Is it quarreling? Is it laziness? Is it
muttering under your breath or holding a
grudge?

Does your home wall see a
critical nature, or frivolous spending, or
a tendency to spend time on fruitless
endeavors?

Hopefully you can say that your
home wall sees patience, kindness,
sacrificial giving of time and money, a
joyful countenance, gratefulness, self-
lessness, encouraging words and many
of the fruits of His Spirit.

As you consider your second
challenge this week, your weak areas—
look very deep—in the private places.
The length of your list doesn't matter!

I can testify to you that
weaknesses can be made into enduring
strengths with the touch of Christ's
power.

When I was 21 years old and
married less than a year, Chip and I
struggled through a hurdle that was

nearly unbearable for him and me. We
talked through the problem many times,
prayed together and read the Lord's
promises.

I doubted I would ever overcome
the pain and this would be a weakness
in our marriage for years to come. He
felt the same way.

Once we added fasting to our
prayers and I sought administration by a
couple of Elders (one came from out of
state), I was healed spiritually in a way I
immediately felt.

Since that very day 27 years
ago, I can say that that particular
weakness in our marriage has been and
continues to be an area of major
strength for us as a couple.

**Ether 5:28 I give unto men weakness,
that they may be humble; and My grace
is sufficient for all men that humble
themselves before Me; for if they humble
themselves before Me, and have faith in
Me, then will I make weak things become
strong unto them.**

Now share your list with an
accountability partner that you trust will
support you and also challenge you to
follow through with checks and balances
every so often.

I will be doing the same thing
along with you. I trust that some of your
weaknesses will be made strong and
fruit will be borne in each of our lives.

Living in Covenant must begin today!