

May Week #3 Devotionals & Consideration



How to Enter into Covenant, and, What Do I Promise to Do?

Now that you've read a handful of God's promises to His Covenant children, are you desirous to make your Covenant, or renew the one you've already made?

If you haven't made Covenant yet, here are the simple steps to start:

1. Repent
2. Believe in Jesus as the Savior
3. Be Baptized

See the words of the Lord that confess these principles in the five Scriptures below.

If you've already made your Covenant, perhaps reading through the following Scriptures will prove to be a reminder as to why you did this, or a conviction to start again!

Ether 2:4 And if it so be that they repent and come unto the Father in the name of Jesus, they shall be received into the kingdom of God.

D&C 16:4e Take upon you the name of Christ, and speak the truth in soberness; and as many as repent, and are baptized in My name, which is Jesus Christ, and endure to the end, the same shall be saved.

2 Nephi 6:48 And He commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in His name, having perfect faith

in the Holy One of Israel, or they can not be saved in the kingdom of God.

Alma 5:25 Therefore come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye may be washed from your sins, that ye may have faith on the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, who is mighty to save and to cleanse from all unrighteousness.

Genesis 6:62 Even so ye must be born again, into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of Mine Only Begotten; that ye may be sanctified from all sin; and enjoy the words of Eternal Life in this world, and Eternal Life in the world to come; even immortal glory.

These five Scriptures and many others describe the way we enter into Covenant, and most of us may have already done this. Sometimes I fear that we forget, however, that coming unto Christ and repenting is a continual process as we grow "here a little and there a little."

Daily repentance may be the most important part of fulfilling our Covenant promises.

The softened heart that accompanies true repentance allows us to keep the commandments out of love and a proper desire.

Proverbs 3:1 ...but let thine heart keep My commandments.

D&C 6:4b Say nothing but repentance unto this generation: keep My commandments, and assist to bring forth My work according to My commandments, and you shall be blessed.

WHAT DO I PROMISE TO DO?

What do the Scriptures say about Covenant living today? What is it? What does it require of us? Once we have taken the steps into Covenant living, what else does the Lord require?

The short answer is: Keep the Commandments!

Most of us can quickly think of the basic requirements or commandments that we hear often, such as repenting, praying, fasting, studying God's word and loving God and others with all our heart. There are many others, less talked about, but perhaps just as important.

As I share some of these, I hope the correlating Scriptures and testimonies will challenge you anew in your Covenant relationship. This is not an exhaustive list of His commands, but reminders that I hope each one of us will implement, if we aren't already doing so.

I have been personally blessed on multiple occasions by following the Lord's gentle commands, and I trust that similar blessings will come to you, too.

1. LOVE THE LORD AND OTHERS

Mark 12:34-36 And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is; Hearken, and hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord; And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment. And the second is like this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as

thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

We all know these are the two greatest commandments, and we are all probably trying to apply them. If you have some people in your life that are difficult to love, I'd like to share two things that have blessed me when trying to "love the unlovable."

The first is an understanding that people need love shown differently.

Gary Chapman's book, "The Five Love Languages" was revolutionary for me in dealing with a couple of people in my life. One I'll share. One of my children at about age seven was regularly acting rejected, defensive and depressed.

When I read Chapman's book, I tried to apply the five different ways he suggested love should be shown: touch, words of affirmation, quality time, acts of service, and gifts. It was a trial and error process and a little bit of detective work, but it made the difference! We turned the corner and our relationship changed for the better.

I tend to show love through acts of service and words of appreciation. Also, physical touch is an easy one for me to express with little children. These three love languages did not speak love to this child at all! I might as well have been speaking Chinese. Hugs and kisses were followed by a push, a frown and a wiped cheek. Quality time was a little helpful. The final one I tried, gifts, really opened this child's heart. I was shocked, because gifts have never been important to me, not even when I was a child.

Love languages can also change with age so if you "figure it out" don't sit back and relax too long, because the great divide can happen again.

This principle applies with anyone, not just children. I challenge you to try sharing love in a new way with someone you are having trouble connecting with.

The second testimony happened when I was a Sophomore in high school. A girl named Jennifer had been a friend of mine since age six. We carpooled to dance lessons and were in school together. Eventually she and her mom joined our church. As we grew older we drifted apart due to a move, different schools, but most of all, different life choices. Even though we attended church together, I really had a tough time loving her.

She had a chip on her shoulder, was cutting with her words, and in my opinion quite negative. I began praying about how to love this girl. I knew she had low self esteem and conflicts at home between her parents, so she needed friends.

I really didn't know how to reach her and my heart was hard towards her. After praying for many months, one Sunday morning while getting ready for church and being in prayer, I was filled from head to toe with love for her. At that moment I was brought to tears and I felt I would do anything in the world for her.

For the first time in my life, I knew what it meant to love someone by the Spirit. This was simply a gift God gave me out of His grace, but only because I asked and prepared. It did change the way I was able to treat her.

If we have the desire to keep this first commandment, God will bless us with the ability to love everyone, especially the unlovable!

2. STUDY

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 of wisdom; seek learning even by study, and also by faith.

And here is a Scripture blessing:

Proverbs 3:1-2 Forget not My law [which means we have to learn it first]; but let thine heart keep My commandments; For length of days, and long life, and peace shall they add to thee.

Seeking instruction and gaining wisdom go along with study.

Proverbs 4 [selected verses] Let thine heart retain My words; keep My commandments, and live. Get wisdom, get understanding; forget it not; neither decline from the words of My mouth. Forsake her not [wisdom], and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting get understanding. Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go; keep her; for she is thy life. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart. For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh.

I had an experience back in my late teen years where I committed to studying my Scriptures for 30 minutes per day and fasting once per week.

I can tell you that after several weeks of doing so, the Lord really opened my awareness and understanding of the Scriptures in a way that I had never experienced before.

During this time of diligent study, the Lord was able to give me answers to problems that I was facing by bringing His word to my mind.

At other times, I have had some long periods when Scripture study and fasting was not part of my life at all. My spirit withered as did my hope; my

family suffered and I lost interest in keeping my Covenant as a result.

Once I began following **Alma 16**, which states that if we will exercise our desire to believe by experimenting on God's Word the Lord will cause a swelling in our bosom to sprout and begin to grow. He says we will know it is a good seed. This promise is true! It works!!

Just two weeks ago from the time of this writing, I was driving to work desiring of God to know what needed to change in my life. I had been in a spiritual wasteland for over two years. [*I use that term not as an overstatement. It was not just a spiritual drought, but a completely barren wasteland.*] While driving to work, I had the feeling that what I needed was to experiment on God's Word again.

God specifically placed in my mind to start by reading **Alma 16**. I'm not sure why because I had not been reading the Book of Mormon or any Scriptures for many months.

The next morning as I was leaving for work, I saw a CD of one of John Larson's Sunday School classes from last fall lying on my desk. I took it with me in the car, not knowing what it was about because I hadn't been at church that Sunday to hear it.

When I started listening, the ENTIRE class was on **Alma 16**. God provided just what I needed at the very time I needed it.

The point is that He is anxious to bless us and fulfill His part of the Covenant—but we must do our part!

3. PRAY AND FAST

Helaman 2:31 Nevertheless, they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and

consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God.

4 Nephi 1:13-14 And they did not walk any more after the performances and ordinances of the Law of Moses, but they did walk after the commandments which they had received from their Lord and their God, continuing in fasting and prayer, and in meeting together oft, both to pray and to hear the Word of the Lord. And it came to pass that there was no contention among all the people, in all the land, but there were mighty miracles wrought among the disciples of Jesus.

When prayer and fasting are coupled together, great things happen!

The act of fasting teaches us that God is our provider—it emphasizes our frail human state—all in a way that, to my knowledge, no other spiritual discipline does. His Spirit is able to reach us and reveal to us in profound ways, and thus our faith grows.

Try it on a regular basis. I look forward to hearing what you discover.

4. BE A GOOD STEWARD

A friend of mine, Corey Stark, recently sent me the following testimony about applying God's financial law and how it has blessed his life and that of his family.

Corey writes: *"Tithing has been something I firmly believe in—regardless of the spiritual state of the Church. The blessings of God are eternal. Growing up, I had always heard of tithing but had never tithed regularly. When I was first out of college, I finally took inventory and calculated I owed \$154 in tithing. I didn't have the money and was working on a farm that summer for [a whopping] \$3.25 per hour. My expenses were few and I was sharing a house with my sister and brother-in-law.*

"I decided I would sacrifice something to save the money, so for three weeks I rode my bike to work [and everywhere] to save gas money, and after about a month I got paid one week [cash] and had exactly \$154.

"I was so happy. I put the cash in my sock and rode my bike home [Blue Springs at the time] with the full intent of putting that cash in an envelope as soon as possible and sending it to the Bishop.

"I walked in the house and my sister was crying. We had all gathered in and no one had any steady work yet. She said the propane tank went out and she didn't know what to do—there was no hot water in the house and she was nursing my nephew.

"Times were hard. She had no money either, but she called the propane company and they brought the minimum amount of propane and said that she could come to the office to pay the bill. They left the bill with her. It was \$152. She was crying because she didn't know what to do and how the bill was going to get paid.

"Without a word, I pulled out the [soggy] cash from my sock [summer time—riding the bike and sweating], and presented it to her. She was elated beyond words.

"I was not able to put the money in the envelope for the Bishop that day, but I knew her need was greater. I felt God wanted me to learn that it is always important that we meet our basic living needs and serve others with our substance. I was able to keep riding my bike, and by the end of the summer I did send the \$154 to the Church. I have never regretted it.

"In paying tithing for 30-ish years I have found many blessings. One blessing is simply this: each year I have owed more tithing than the previous year, which is simply an indicator that

God increases our increase if we are faithful to Him.

"After Marji and I owned our first house, we were about to outgrow it and decided it was time to move. We put up a FOR SALE BY OWNER sign. I had calculated our tithing for that year, but had not taken the time to send in the statement to the Bishop as I had in years past—believing that it was 'more of a formality' than necessary.

"But there was this burning feeling that if I would take care of filling out the statement and send it in perhaps our house would sell.

"One night, I felt urged to complete the accounting part and as I signed the paper on our kitchen table and put it in the envelope [I was going to deliver it to the post office in the morning so it would arrive to the Church ASAP], I picked up my Bible, and it fell out of my hands onto the kitchen table. It opened exactly to the verse in **Malachi** stating, **I will pour you out a blessing without room to receive.** The Spirit burned in confirmation.

"That morning I dropped off the envelope on the way to work. By the time I arrived at work there was a message from Marji to call home [pre-cell phone days]. I called home and Marji said a family called to make an offer on the house—full asking price—and they made the offer at the exact time I was putting the tithing envelope in the post office box.

"Even more so, we wanted whoever purchased our house to have the same spiritual blessing we had had there—it turned out the family were Church members, too. They still live there to this day [22 years later].

"I have many times received blessings in multiples of the amount I tithed. A few years ago I filed our tithing and on the very next day was offered a contract for [exactly] 10 times the

amount I had just committed to pay in tithing. That has happened more than once."

Corey obviously has implemented one aspect of his financial covenant with the Lord. He references the familiar promise in **Malachi** which is similarly referenced in **3 Nephi 11:13-15**.

Many of you have similar stories to share about financial stewardship. This command should be a pleasure to us as we see the enormous NOW blessings that follow.

I would suggest we should also be a good steward over our bodies and God's world.

D&C 85:38b addresses specific ways we are to take care of our bodies: **Cease to sleep longer than is needful; retire to thy bed early, that ye may not be weary; arise early, that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated.**

Also read **D&C 119** and all of **D&C 86**.

Perhaps this is one of the clearest Scriptures, which states the importance of the stewardship over our own bodies:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 **Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.**

The story of the talents found in **Matthew 25** positively pronounces the way the Lord desires to bless us for the wise use of our money and talents.

D&C 60:3e **Thou shalt not idle away thy time; neither shalt thou bury thy talent that it may not be known.**

Using time wisely is a stewardship I was blessed to learn at a young

age, thanks to my mother. It seems that our fast-paced world makes it even more of a challenge to have time for others.

Just two minutes ago, my son Josh asked his brother, "Do you want to watch that show?" Jacob's reply was, "Don't watch TV Josh. It's a waste of time."

Is there any area that you can improve your stewardship over your time, which really isn't yours anyway, is it?

5. FORGIVE

Two other ways we have promised to keep our Covenant with our Lord, is to forgive others and serve others.

Matthew 6:16 **For if you forgive men their trespasses, ...your heavenly Father will also forgive you....**

Perhaps the latter is easier than the former for many of you. When forgiveness seems like a difficult task, may I remind you that forgiveness is a mental choice, not a feeling.

I have several times made the mental choice to forgive someone that I did not FEEL like forgiving. Upon doing so [forgiving], the Lord softened my heart toward that person afterward.

Perhaps you remember hearing the testimony of Corrie Ten Boon who had been confined in the Nazi concentration camp at Ravensbruck. Years later while speaking about her years in bondage, she came face to face with one of her captors, the very one who was responsible for her sister Betsy's execution.

Corrie states that she immediately felt hatred toward this man, who now was no longer a Nazi soldier but a professed Christian.

He confronted her and asked for her forgiveness. In her own words she says, "I could NOT forgive him. I only remembered how he tortured my sister Betsy."

However, she remembered the Lord's command that we are required to forgive everyone or we will not receive forgiveness of our own sin.

She told the man that she did forgive him and she states that instantly she felt her heart change. She states, "You have never felt the ocean of God's love until you forgive your enemies."

6. SERVE

Another way we should hold up our Covenant is to serve others. This one we know to be true from the many Scriptures that deal with service. I'll remind you of just a few.

Galatians 5:13 By love serve one another.

Mosiah 1:49 And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings, ye are only in the service of your God.

D&C 4:1b Therefore, O ye that embark in the service of God, see that ye serve Him with all your heart, might, mind, and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day.

Serving others starts with a heart-felt attitude. This is one that I am not very good at—it does not come naturally. I'm often too busy to even be aware of others' needs or how I can serve them.

Not only is the type of act important, [does it meet the other person's need? Or just fulfill a place of "I did good" in one's own mind?], but the timing is just as important. Taking winter coats to the needy in July might not be the best timing for their needs.

Or missing an opportunity to send a get well card until someone is already well are simplistic examples of our timing being off.

Make yourself available and aware. The Lord will bless both them and you!

7. TRUST GOD

[DON'T WORRY AND COMPLAIN]

Psalms 5:11 But let all those that put their trust in Thee rejoice; let them ever shout for joy.

Psalms 28:7 The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise Him.

Another area of Covenant living that I have struggled with in recent years is trusting God.

This phrase has always seemed a bit trite to me, carrying little application in my young life because I usually felt confident and in control so I didn't know how to show God I trusted Him.

In the last few years I have struggled against God. I wasn't knocking, seeking or asking.

As I hit "a rock bottom" kind of low, with three or four things out of control in my life, the Lord brought to my awareness that I was not trusting Him.

Only as my pride was shattered, was I left with no other alternative than to trust Him. I was trying to take away others' agency, something I don't have the power or the right to do.

I needed to let go and trust God to take care of their choices, their pains, their learning process. This "aha" experience came quite tearfully, but I eventually recognized that God was prompting my thoughts.

I agreed to pray and fast about my lack-of-trust issue and how it was tearing me and the others apart. Since then, He has taught me, and still is teaching me, that letting Him be in control releases and frees us from daily stress. It also honors Him. I learned that pride and trust cannot co-exist in us.

In addition to the commandments we've touched on and their subsequent promises in Covenant living, there are many more. Due to space I won't talk about each one, but I do want to leave you with a list of what the Scriptures say we have committed to doing as a Covenant child of God.

If you haven't studied, pondered, or experimented with these before, add them to your challenge for the coming months.

8. PRAISE GOD AND GIVE THANKS

9. WITNESS FOR HIM REGULARLY

10. SUPPORT OUR LEADERS [PRIESTHOOD AND NATION]

11. DEVELOP RIGHTEOUS LIVING HABITS

These would include:

- doing good to those that hate us,
- not judging or being critical,
- being giving not selfish,
- being compassionate and meek,
- repressing unnecessary wants,
- being slow to anger,
- not taking the Lord's name in vain, and
- returning what you borrow.

Can you think of others?

As you can see, there are many parts to fulfilling your promise to live in a Covenant relationship.

God also is bound to keep His part of the Covenant—promises He will fulfill.

Psalms 89:34 My Covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.

D&C 81:3b I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say, but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise.

How exciting and comforting to know that God fulfills His Covenant and blesses us accordingly when we keep His commandments.

He already has fulfilled His promise of sending a Savior to provide for our remission of sin and a way to Eternal Life.

This fulfilled Covenant is all we really need!

But it's nice to know He still reaches down and follows through on [perhaps in our opinion] the smaller things in our life as well.