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Waiting Upon the Lord

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Waiting Upon the Lord

HENRY B. EYRING

I'm grateful to be with you this evening and for the kind things that have been said. I am grateful also to be with you at the beginning of the year as the stakes and the wards are being organized. You are in a time, I hope, of at least a little uncertainty and some feelings of being in assignments that are beyond you.

Bringing Down the Powers of Heaven

I would like to talk with you about something that matters to you now and that, in the months and not many years ahead, will matter to you more. You will be in situations where you will want to know how to bring down the powers of heaven. I will suggest how you might do that by waiting upon the Lord. I pray that we may be blessed to learn together because I need to understand better how to get help, too.

You and I struggle to bring down the powers of heaven. Oh, you may not think about it much, but sometimes you do. You go along on your own and then, suddenly, that's not enough. Something dramatic may happen, like having a friend or family member who needs a blessing. Or perhaps something dramatic doesn't happen; you realize that you've been teaching your class or visiting the people who have

been assigned to your care with no visible effect. That may make you doubt yourself or the person who called you or even whether you have the power to reach God.

Now, my worry is not about your testimony. You have all had spiritual experiences, and most of you have recognized them. Some of you have had remarkable spiritual experiences. If I called you up here to bear your testimony, you could do it by citing spiritual manifestations in your own experience.

But what I'm worried about, and at least unconsciously you are, too, is a fact put bluntly by a President of the Church once. His name was Heber J. Grant, and this is what he said. It was true when he said it, and it still is.

Here are his words. Listen carefully.

There is but one path of safety to the Latter-day Saints, and that is the path of duty. It is not testimony, it is not marvelous manifestations, it is not knowing that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is true, . . .

Henry B. Eyring was the first counselor in the Presiding Bishopric of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given at Brigham Young University on 30 September 1990.

it is not actually knowing that the Savior is the Redeemer, and that Joseph Smith was His prophet, that will save you and me, but it is the keeping of the commandments of God, the living the life of a Latter-day Saint. [Heber J. Grant, *Improvement Era*, November 1936, p. 659]

Now you and I know that the path of duty and living the life of a Latter-day Saint require our bringing down the powers of heaven. Think about the duties that really matter to a Latter-day Saint: rearing children in a world of wickedness; caring for the poor when you have trouble just caring for yourselves; being a witness for the Savior wherever we may be, in whatever circumstances. You remember how Alma described the covenant you and I made at the waters of baptism:

As ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light;

Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life—

Now I say unto you, if this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you? [Mosiah 18:8–10]

In more thoughtful times, like tonight, you and I realize that the promise of serving so that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon us is more than a nice reward; it is a necessity. For what matters, our own power is not enough. You know that getting help won't be easy or automatic.

Let me tell you a true story, from my life, that will likely strike a chord in your memories of your own spiritual life.

Years ago I was asked to chair a committee of faculty from this university and others with this question to study: What should be the future of higher education in the Church?

Elder Neal A. Maxwell was then the commissioner of education. I told him I didn't think I could do it without the help of heaven. He asked if I would like a blessing. I've forgotten how it was arranged that I would see Elder Alvin R. Dyer. That was especially pleasant for me, since I had been a priest once in a ward where he was the bishop, the president of my quorum. He listened sympathetically to my story, put his hands on my head, and gave me a blessing that included words like this as a promise: "In this assignment, and in many others which will come to you, your mind will be guided in channels toward the truth." That blessing gave me confidence, maybe too much confidence. The committee began its work. And after months of what seemed to me futile effort, I felt some desperation, much as you do when heaven seems to withhold its help in a task you know matters and is beyond you.

I somehow managed to arrange another interview. This one was with President Harold B. Lee. He received me in a kindly way. In my anxiety, I soon blurted out my question: "President Lee, how do I get revelation?"

He smiled. I am glad he didn't laugh, since it was an odd question to ask. But he answered my question with a story. It was essentially this. He said that during World War II he had been part of a group studying the question "What should the Church be doing for its members in the military service?" He said they conducted interviews at bases up and down the country. They had data gathered. They had the data analyzed. They went back for more interviews. But still, no plan emerged.

Then he gave me the lesson, which I now give to you, in about these words: "Hal, when

we had done all we knew how to do, when we had our backs to the wall, then God gave us the revelation. Hal, if you want to get revelation, do your homework.”

I suppose I should have been embarrassed to take his time to learn what the Lord told us all long ago. You remember the rebuke to Oliver Cowdery and to you and me and to all of our Father’s children who are called to duties that take the powers of heaven. You remember the words. I am always impressed at how kindly they really were.

Be patient, my son, for it is wisdom in me, and it is not expedient that you should translate at this present time.

Behold, the work which you are called to do is to write for my servant Joseph.

And, behold, it is because that you did not continue as you commenced, when you began to translate, that I have taken away this privilege from you.

Do not murmur, my son, for it is wisdom in me that I have dealt with you after this manner.

Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me.

But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.

But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong; therefore, you cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me.

Now, if you had known this you could have translated; nevertheless, it is not expedient that you should translate now. [D&C 9:3–10]

Now, in fairness to Oliver Cowdery, he had some reason to be confused. The Prophet Joseph seemed to have the windows of heaven opened to him. The words of revelation came to him, both to translate the Book of Mormon

and to give us the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants, at a speed that could easily have misled Oliver.

I bear you my solemn testimony that the Lord opens the heavens to his servants today. He will answer your prayers for help beyond your human understanding. But I also bear you my testimony that the words *study it out* mean a degree of patience, of labor, of persistence commensurate with the value of what you seek.

A Promise

Alma gave his son advice that is good for us. He said:

Preach unto them repentance, and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ; teach them to humble themselves and to be meek and lowly in heart; teach them to withstand every temptation of the devil, with their faith on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Teach them to never be weary of good works, but to be meek and lowly in heart; for such shall find rest to their souls. [Alma 37:33–34]

The good works that really matter require the help of heaven. And the help of heaven requires working past the point of fatigue so far that only the meek and lowly will keep going long enough.

The Lord doesn’t put us through this test just to give us a grade; he does it because the process will change us.

President Harold B. Lee described that once in general conference. He said:

To become converted, according to the scriptures, meant having a change of heart and the moral character of a person turned from the controlled power of sin into a righteous life. It meant to “wait patiently on the Lord” until one’s prayers can be answered. [CR, April 1971, p. 92]

If we are going to do our duty, we are going to need the powers of heaven. And if we are

going to be given access to the powers of heaven, we are going to have to learn to wait upon the Lord.

The word *wait* in scripture language means to hope for or anticipate. Surely the great prophet Isaiah meant that, and I think he meant more, when he made us a glorious promise. It's a promise I carved for my oldest son, Henry, a graduate of this university, when he had just turned twelve.

I carved this board. I got better as the boys came along, by the way, if you don't admire my carving. It was a height board. The idea was that we would put the board on a wall for my son, and when certain things happened in his life, we would carve that event. I carved it after he was twelve. He had just received his Eagle badge, so the word *deacon* is not carved there. It begins with *teacher*. This plaque goes through *teacher, priest, elder, mission, and marriage*. When it started, it was empty. So I knew it needed something nice at the top; it needed a crest and a motto. Since he had just won his Eagle Scout badge, I carved an eagle at the top with this legend from Isaiah as his motto. It reads: "On Eagles' Wings."

Oh, but I wish there had been more room on the board so that I could have carved there the whole lesson. I would like to give it to you tonight. How would he be lifted as on eagles' wings? Here's the lesson from the great prophet, whose words the Lord commended to us.

But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. [Isaiah 40:31]

If I were to try to help you, or my son, have that glorious blessing—that you not be weary in doing your duty, I would tell you the little I know about waiting upon the Lord.

The scriptures, what I see around me, and my own experience tell me that this scripture

has a key in it. Listen carefully to this scripture. It is one Alma teaches us:

And now I would that ye should be humble, and be submissive and gentle; easy to be entreated; full of patience and long-suffering; being temperate in all things; being diligent in keeping the commandments of God at all times; asking for whatsoever things ye stand in need, both spiritual and temporal; always returning thanks unto God for whatsoever things ye do receive.

And see that ye have faith, hope, and charity, and then ye will always abound in good works.

And may the Lord bless you, and keep your garments spotless. [Alma 7:23–25]

Being submissive, gentle, easy to be entreated, and patient are all attributes. But the actions Alma commends to us are to ask for what we need and to return thanks. Please don't think of that as a routine command to say your prayers. Oh, it is much more than that. If you pray, if you talk to God, and if you plead for the help you need, and if you thank him not only for help but for the patience and gentleness that come from not receiving all you desire right away or perhaps ever, then I promise you that you will draw closer to him. And then you will become diligent and long-suffering.

Live on the Lord's Side of the Line

Let me tell you another way you can make a simple choice that will surely bring down on you the powers of heaven. Just as you sometimes feel the great need to have heaven's help in your service, you must often sense a need for help to resist evil. Just as prayer is a simple choice, there is a simple choice you can make to bring the powers of heaven to you that you might live clean in a wicked world.

President George Albert Smith made you a promise. It seemed so powerful that I wondered if the quotation when I found it was taken out of context. So I looked it up.

I checked the original source and found that context is no problem since this statement was printed alone in a box by itself. It has no context. He said:

*There are two influences ever present in the world. One is constructive and elevating and comes from our Heavenly Father; the other is destructive and debasing and comes from Lucifer. We have our agency and make our own choice in life subject to these unseen powers. There is a division line well defined that separates the Lord's territory from Lucifer's. If we live on the Lord's side of the line Lucifer cannot come there to influence us, but if we cross the line into his territory we are in his power. By keeping the commandments of the Lord we are safe on His side of the line, but if we disobey His teachings we voluntarily cross into the zone of temptation and invite the destruction that is ever present there. Knowing this, how anxious we should always be to live on the Lord's side of the line. [George Albert Smith, *Improvement Era*, May 1935, p. 278]*

You can make a simple choice: you can decide to move toward the Savior, toward his side. You can do it tonight when you decide what to do with the time that's left before you sleep. Each of you will have different alternatives, but the choice will be clear. President Smith said the line was clear. And you remember Mormon told his son, Moroni, exactly what marked the line and why it was so clear. Think about this when you decide what video you might watch, what magazine you might pick up, or whatever you might do. Mormon said to his son:

For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God.

But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil; for after this manner doth the devil work, for he persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him. [Moroni 7:16–17]

Now I plead with you to take that seriously. The world will become more wicked. You will need the help of heaven to keep the commandments. You will need it more and more as the days go on. Satan will expand the space that is not safe. He will try every way he can to persuade you that there is no danger in trying to come as close as you can to that dividing line. At the same time he is trying to persuade people that there really is no line at all. Because he knows you know it is there, he will say to you, "Come closer to the line."

But you can bring the protective powers of heaven down on you by simply deciding to go toward the Savior, to wait on him. Satan will tell you, as he has done regularly for ages, that you will not be happy in safety, that you must come near his ground to live the happy life. Well, that is a clear choice, too. Here it is, put about as plainly as you will get it by Nephi:

Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself. [2 Nephi 2:27]

I hope you will remember that when you see some beautifully packaged, cleverly advertised invitation to go to Satan's territory. It will be funny or pleasant or charming or glamorous; but remember, he wants you as miserable as he is himself. He lies to you to tell you that you must go toward him to find happiness.

Listen for the Voice of the Lord

As long as we are being plain about choices, there is another way you can decide to wait upon the Lord. Again, it is a choice to move to safety by doing your duty. It takes a decision both about how to use your time and where to put your ego. And you can use it in the next week. Here it is again from that plain speaker, President Harold B. Lee:

Now the only safety we have as members of this church is to do exactly what the Lord said to the Church in that day when the Church was organized. We must learn to give heed to the words and commandments that the Lord shall give through his prophet, "as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me; . . . as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith" (D&C 21:4–5). There will be some things that take patience and faith. You may not like what comes from the authority of the Church. It may contradict your political views. . . . It may interfere with some of your social life. But if you listen to these things, as if from the mouth of the Lord himself, with patience and faith, the promise is that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name's glory" (D&C 21:6). [CR, October 1970, p. 152]

I'll add a promise to you of my own. If you will wait upon the Lord while you listen to this next general conference, if you will listen for his voice, you will recognize it in the words spoken by his servants. Forget about them as human personalities, and when the conference is over, I promise you that you will have a quiet assurance that those human beings are called of God and that God honors their calls.

I will make you that same promise the next time your bishop speaks to you. I was in my ward this afternoon, and our bishop spoke. As my wife and I left, we said, "You could feel, couldn't you, when the Holy Ghost came."

He bore testimony, and I knew that bishop, who is my neighbor, was as called of God as I have ever known that any human being was called of God.

Now you try it with your bishop. He might sometime soon decide to talk to you. Listen. Wait upon the Lord as he speaks. Don't worry about him as a human being. You just listen and see if you can hear the voice of the Lord. I will promise you not only that you will hear what you should hear, but that you will see his call is a call from God, and you will find it far easier to be the faithful servant in your ward.

You might even try it with your home teachers or your visiting teachers. While they are there, wait upon the Lord, listen and see if you can know what it is God would have you do. It may not even be in their words. It may be things that will come to you while they speak, but you will know. And you will know that it is coming to you because you are waiting upon the Lord by honoring his servants. And when you see that God can honor the callings of such ordinary people, you will find your faith increased that he may magnify what you are doing in your own service. You won't always see the miracles that come from your work, which is probably a blessing. If you did, you would get proud. But you can often underestimate what God is doing as he honors your calling.

You Came for the Savior

You've surely noticed how much we've talked about meekness, about service, about waiting, and about submission. That ought to raise a question something like this: Aren't we trying to get a first-class education at this university that produces independence, critical thinking, and, even as we do in the scientific method, the proper use of skepticism? Those attitudes have been used by many people, and they have produced the secular miracles of our age. How in the world, you might ask, do you

expect us to excel in using our intellects and yet wait so patiently upon the Lord?

Let me encourage you by telling you a story. It was told to me by my father. He told it with the intent to chuckle at himself. It was a story about his trying to do his duty, just the way you try to do your duty.

Now you have to know a little bit about my father. His name was Henry Eyring, like mine. He had done some of the things students of this university are preparing to be able to do. His work in chemistry was substantial enough to bring the honors some of you will someday have, but he was still a member of a ward of the Church with his duty to do. To appreciate this story, you have to realize that it occurred when he was nearly eighty and had bone cancer. He had bone cancer so badly in his hips that he could hardly move. The pain was great.

Dad was the senior high councilor in his stake with the responsibility for the welfare farm. An assignment was given to weed a field of onions, so Dad assigned himself to go work on the farm.

Dad never told me how hard it was, but I have met several people who were with him that day. I talked to one of them on the phone the other night to check the story. The one I talked to said that he was weeding in the row next to Dad through much of the day. He told me the same thing that others who were there that day have told me. He said that the pain was so great that Dad was pulling himself along on his stomach with his elbows. He couldn't kneel. The pain was too great for him to kneel. Everyone who has talked to me has remarked how Dad smiled, and laughed, and talked happily with them as they worked in that field of onions.

Now, this is the joke Dad told me on himself, afterward. He said he was there at the end of the day. After all the work was finished and the onions were all weeded, someone asked him, "Henry, good heavens! You didn't pull *those* weeds, did you? Those weeds were

sprayed two days ago, and they were going to die anyway."

Dad just roared. He thought that was the funniest thing. He thought it was a great joke on himself. He had worked through the day in the wrong weeds. They had been sprayed and would have died anyway.

When Dad told me this story, I knew how tough it was. So I said to him, "Dad, how could you make a joke out of that? How could you take it so pleasantly?"

He said something to me that I will never forget, and I hope you won't. He said, "Hal, I wasn't there for the weeds."

Now, you'll be in an onion patch much of your life. So will I. It will be hard to see the powers of heaven magnifying us or our efforts. It may even be hard to see our work being of any value at all. And sometimes our work won't go well.

But you didn't come for the weeds. You came for the Savior. And if you pray, and if you choose to be clean, and if you choose to follow God's servants, you will be able to work and wait long enough to bring down the powers of heaven.

Don't worry too much about the apparent conflict between your scholarly ambitions and doing your duty to God as a humble Latter-day Saint. Both take diligence and enough humility to endure not having things go your way. But the rewards are far different, far greater.

I was with Dad in the White House in Washington, D.C., the morning he got the National Medal of Science from the president of the United States. I missed the days when he got all the other medals and prizes. But, oh, how I'd like to be with him on the morning he gets the prize he won for his days in the onion patches. He was there to wait on the Lord. And you and I can do that, too. We could wait on the Lord tonight.

I pray that we will, tonight, tomorrow, and on and on. Then maybe we can hear this said of us:

And now, my son, I trust that I shall have great joy in you, because of your steadiness and your faithfulness unto God; for as you have commenced in your youth to look to the Lord your God, even so I hope that you will continue in keeping his commandments; for blessed is he that endureth to the end. [Alma 38:2]

My brothers and sisters, tonight I have talked about the little I know about waiting upon the Lord. I have given some examples of prayer, of choosing to be as far on the Lord's side as you can get, of listening to the Brethren and trying to hear in their voices the voice of the Lord. If you will think about it, you will realize that for me to tell you too many details of what you ought to do is itself not wise, because you should wait upon the Lord to find out for yourself.

Now I would like to tell you what I plan to do. You will each make your own application plan. I have some little cards. I am going to carry with me 2 Nephi 32:9. And the next time I get asked by a bishop or my quorum leader to do something, here is what I am going to try to remember. Could you remember this?

But behold, I say unto you that ye must pray always, and not faint; that ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul. [2 Nephi 32:9]

Now here is my plan. Next time I decide to do something, I think I will ask in prayer, "Heavenly Father, is this what the Lord would have me do?" And I think I will wait upon the

Lord until I know. Then I might say, "Please, while I am working at it, can I remember that I am doing it for the Lord?" I promise you that if you will be patient and diligent, you will have a blessing come to you that you will know that you are doing what the Lord would have you do. And you can be blessed to remember that while you are in that onion patch, you are not there for the weeds. That will be important sometimes when the weeds don't come out easily. You can feel the approval of God.

But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. [Isaiah 40:31]

Dad never got better. He just got worse. So you might say, "Well, he waited upon the Lord, but he couldn't run and he couldn't walk." But that was true only in this life. There will be a day for you and me when, whatever difficulties and limitations we have here, we will have that promise fulfilled for us. We will be lifted up as on eagles' wings, and it will be those who have waited upon the Lord.

I pray you might know that this is the Church of Jesus Christ. He is the head of it. He is our master. We serve him. We wait upon him. I bear you my testimony that there is a prophet called of God. Those who lead you in the kingdom are called of God.

You can by faithful service wait upon the Lord. I pray that you will do your duty. I promise you that is the path of safety. I pray that God will give you the power that you might do it always, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.