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# THE HEALING POWER OF GRATITUDE

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**By President Russell M. Nelson**

*President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

*As a doctor I know the value of good therapy. So, dear friends, may I prescribe two activities to help us experience the healing power of gratitude.*

During my 96 years of life, I have seen a Great Depression, a world war, the rise of terrorism, hunger, and poverty throughout the world. I have also witnessed the advent of space travel, the internet, medical advancements galore, and countless other discoveries that delight me.

Prior to my ministry, I was a cardiovascular and thoracic surgeon and spent many hours in operating rooms. As a surgical resident, I was one of the research team that developed the first heart-lung machine to be used in a human open-heart operation.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, I had the privilege of helping to save lives of hundreds of patients, and, sadly, I watched other patients die despite my best efforts.

As a man of science and as a man of faith, the current worldwide pandemic has been of great concern to me. As a man of science, I appreciate the critical need to prevent the spread of infection. I also honor the devoted service of health care professionals and grieve for the many whose lives have been upended by COVID-19.

As a man of faith, however, I view the current pandemic as only one of many ills that plague our world, including hate, civil unrest, racism, violence, dishonesty, and lack of civility.

Skilled scientists and researchers are laboring diligently to develop and distribute a vaccine against the coronavirus. But there is no medication or operation that can fix the many spiritual woes and maladies that we face.

There is, however, a remedy—one that may seem surprising—because it flies in the face of our natural intuitions. Nevertheless, its effects have been validated by scientists as well as men and women of faith.

I am referring to the healing power of *gratitude*.

The book of Psalms is filled with admonitions to express gratitude. Here are just three of them:

“It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord.”<sup>2</sup>

“O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good.”<sup>3</sup>

“Come before his presence with thanksgiving.”<sup>4</sup>

Jesus Christ frequently expressed gratitude. Before raising Lazarus from the dead, before miraculously multiplying loaves and fishes, and before passing the cup to His disciples at the Last Supper, the Savior prayed and gave thanks to God. No wonder the Apostle Paul later declared, “In every thing give thanks.”<sup>5</sup>

Over my nine and a half decades of life, I have concluded that *counting* our blessings is far better than *recounting* our problems. No matter our situation, showing gratitude for our privileges is a fast-acting and long-lasting spiritual prescription.

Does gratitude spare us from sorrow, sadness, grief, and pain? No, but it does soothe our feelings. It provides us with a greater perspective on the very purpose and joy of life.

Nearly 16 years ago my wife Dantzel and I were sitting on the sofa holding hands while we watched television. Suddenly, she collapsed. Despite being well trained to treat the very thing that ended her life, I could not save my own wife.

Dantzel and I were blessed with nine daughters and one son. Tragically, I have lost two of those daughters to cancer. No parent is prepared to lose a child.

And yet, despite these and other difficult experiences, I am incredibly, eternally *grateful* for so very many things.

I am grateful to God for the nearly 60 years Dantzel and I shared together, for a lifetime of love and joy and cherished memories. And I thank Him for my wife Wendy, whom I met after Dantzel’s passing. She now fills my life with joy.

I am grateful to God for the years I had with my two departed daughters. This father’s heart melts when I see attributes of those girls in the precious faces of their children and grandchildren.

We can all give thanks for the beauties of the earth and the majesty of the heavens that give us an inkling of the vastness of eternity.

We can give thanks for the gift of life, for our amazing bodies and minds that allow us to grow and learn.

We can give thanks for art, literature, and music that nurture our souls.

We can give thanks for the opportunity to repent, start over, make amends, and build character.

We can give thanks for our families, friends, and loved ones.

We can give thanks for the opportunity to help, cherish, and serve one another, which makes life so much more meaningful.

We can even give thanks for our trials, from which we learn things we would not know otherwise.

Most of all, we can give thanks unto God, the Father of our spirits, which makes us all brothers and sisters—one great global family.

As a doctor, I know the value of good therapy. So, dear friends, may I prescribe two activities to help us *experience* the healing power of gratitude.

First, I invite you—just for the next seven days—to turn social media into your own personal *gratitude journal*. Post every day about *what* you are grateful for, *whom* you are grateful for, and *why* you are grateful. At the end of seven days, see if you feel happier and more at peace. Use the hashtag #GiveThanks. Working together, we can flood social media with a wave of gratitude that reaches the four corners of the earth. Perhaps this will fulfill, in part, the promise God gave to Father Abraham, that through his descendants “all families of the earth [shall] be blessed.”<sup>6</sup>

Second, let us unite in thanking God through daily prayer. Jesus Christ taught His disciples to pray by first expressing gratitude to God and then petitioning Him for the things we need. Prayer brings forth miracles.

In that spirit, I would now like to offer a prayer for the world and everyone in it. As I pray, I hope you will feel inspired to do the same, pouring out your heart in gratitude for the countless blessings God has given you and petitioning Him to heal our hearts, our families, our societies, and the world at large.

Our Father in Heaven, as fellow passengers on Thy planet earth, we humbly pray unto Thee. We thank Thee for life and all that sustains life. We thank Thee for the beauties of the earth, for order in the universe,

the planets, stars, and all things of eternal significance. We thank Thee for Thy laws that protect and guide us. We thank Thee for Thy mercy and loving watchcare. We thank Thee for our families and loved ones who fill our lives with joy.

We are grateful for all who are striving to combat the COVID pandemic. Please bless them with protection and inspiration. Wilt Thou help us end this virus that has plagued so many of Thy children.

We thank Thee for the leaders of nations and others who strive to lift us. We pray for relief from political strife. Wilt Thou bless us with a healing spirit that unites us despite our differences.

Wilt Thou also help us repent from selfishness, unkindness, pride, and prejudice of any kind so that we can better serve and love one another as brothers and sisters and as Thy grateful children. We love Thee, our dear Father, and pray for Thy blessings upon us in the name of Thy Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, amen.

May God bless you and your loved ones.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In Minneapolis, Minnesota, March 1951.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 92:1.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 136:1.

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 95:2.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 12:3.

