

# *We Need an Endowment*

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I am extremely grateful and humbled to be with you and to have the chance to speak at this last devotional of the semester. This invitation is especially meaningful to me because I have three members of my immediate family who are current students at BYU: a daughter who is a freshman and a daughter who is a sophomore; the third student is my wife, Cindy, who is graduating in a few weeks with her master's degree from the BYU Marriott School of Business. I am so proud of her, and I love her with my whole heart and soul, and that's why I affectionately call her my Sweat-heart.

I want to speak with each of you today as if you are my own family members about a subject of great importance, and I pray the Spirit can be with us as I do so.

I am fortunate enough that a major part of my work on campus is teaching the cornerstone religion course called Foundations of the Restoration. I love teaching that class, and I love exploring the marvelous restored gospel with many of you. At the end of every class, I have a little

call-and-answer tradition that I like to do with my students.

As they get ready to leave, I call out to them, "The Restoration continues!"

And as I point to them, they answer back in unison, "Let us continue in it!"

But we all know it is easier said than done to continue in the ongoing Restoration—especially in our day. We are living in a wonderful yet difficult time, one that I think future historians will discuss as among the most spiritually challenging eras in the history of the restored Church. And not just for our church. There is abundant evidence that faith in organized religion in general is noticeably slipping, particularly in America. A recent study by the Pew Research Center found that while in 2007 only 16 percent of Americans did not have a religious affiliation, today it is 29 percent. In fact, the fastest growing religious affiliation in America is no religious affiliation at all.<sup>1</sup> And much of the growth of the non-religious has come from the rising generations.

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*Anthony Sweat, associate professor of Church history and doctrine, delivered this devotional address on April 5, 2022.*

The Pew Research Center reported that younger adults are less likely to identify with any religion than older adults, particularly in North America and Europe.<sup>2</sup>

People have been leaving faith and returning to faith in all generations and dispensations, but what is notable is the rate at which it seems to be happening right now and the amount we hear about it because of amplified social channels. Today, losing faith feels fast and loud.

### **An Endowment from God**

So how do we meet the spiritual challenges of our day and continue in the ongoing Restoration? While I don't believe there's any one easy answer to solve every important and complex issue related to modern faith challenges, I do believe there is something that can empower us to successfully navigate and overcome the current tests we face if we will better understand it, seek it, and receive it.

Do you want to know what it is? Good!

In order to do that, we need to go back to the year 1835 in Kirtland, Ohio. Close your eyes and mentally travel down some dirt roads. Put on your bonnet or grow your beard (you have permission to do so momentarily!), and picture yourself in a meeting in which the Prophet Joseph Smith is teaching the recently formed Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Unlike today's quorum, this first group was relatively young and inexperienced in the Church. The oldest apostle was only thirty-five, and four of the apostles were in their early twenties, similar in age to many of you students here today. Now you might think that everything was spiritually great at this time in American history and in the Church. The Kirtland Temple was almost completed, and converts were flocking to Ohio. Sounds pretty good, right? Well, think again. In the recorded remarks of his sermon to the Twelve, Joseph noted that "darkness prevails at this time [the same] as it was at the time Jesus Christ was about to be crucified."<sup>3</sup>

Does that sound familiar?

Joseph then proceeded to instruct them on something that he said was "calculated to unite our hearts, . . . that our faith may be strong, so that Satan cannot overthrow us nor have any power over us."<sup>4</sup>

What was this?

I imagine him giving this next line in a way that was emphatic and to the point, expressing what he felt was needed to conquer the spiritual challenges of their day. The Prophet said, "You need an endowment . . . in order that you may be prepared and able to overcome all things."<sup>5</sup>

That was the key for them, and I believe it can be the key for us.

*We need an endowment!*

Let's be careful here so that we don't misunderstand. When you hear the word *endowment*, what comes to your mind? What do you envision? It's likely that many of you picture a priesthood ceremony in the temple. That's normal because that's how we often use the word. But if I can, I want to shift our thinking to understand endowment a little differently. When Joseph Smith said we need an endowment to overcome the spiritual challenges we face, he wasn't just saying we need a religious ceremony. What he meant was that we need an endowment of spiritual power, or a heavenly gift of divine knowledge, experience, capacity, and ability.<sup>6</sup> That's how he and the scriptures often described endowment—as a heavenly bestowal of spiritual power.<sup>7</sup>

To say it another way, there is a difference between an endowment and the presentation of the endowment. The endowment is a divine power, and the presentation of the endowment is an authorized religious ceremony to facilitate that power. If we can understand that one concept alone, I believe our time together today will have been well worth it.

The Savior revealed that "in the ordinances [of the priesthood], the power of godliness is manifest" (Doctrine and Covenants 84:20). Other words for *manifest* are *present* or *show*. The ordinances manifest, or they present us with, unique covenant opportunities to access the power that God is offering, but we receive and maintain that power through righteous living (see Doctrine and Covenants 121:41–46).

Sometimes when people participate in the temple endowment ceremony, they may not really understand it at first or they might not feel much different after they leave the temple than before they entered. But we don't get fully endowed

with power in a few hours. If we understand that endowment is a spiritual capacity, then we need to develop that capacity over time through faithfully seeking to understand and diligently living the concepts and covenants presented in the temple endowment ceremony.

So if we are promised that we can “be endowed with power from on high” (Doctrine and Covenants 38:32) through the temple, what is that power and what does it look like? What new or greater power and capacity can we have that we otherwise wouldn’t have? As I have prepared for this devotional, I have asked many people these questions, and I have been touched by the profound responses I have heard, but I have also been a little disheartened at the inability of some to give even a single answer at all. If we don’t know what power is manifest, then how can we focus on it and strive to attain it?

Doctrine and Covenants 107 gives a great overall summary of some of the powers that come to those who are endowed:

*[They] have the privilege of receiving the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, to have the heavens opened unto them, to commune with the general assembly and church of the Firstborn, and to enjoy the communion and presence of God the Father, and Jesus the mediator of the new covenant. [Doctrine and Covenants 107:19; see also verse 18]*

In simpler words, through receiving and living temple ordinances and covenants, we can have greater power to receive revelation, to call upon the heavens and have them hear us, to have the promised ministering of angels to help us, and to truly come to know our Savior, Jesus Christ, and God our Father in very personal ways.

*Yes, we need an endowment!*

The concepts and covenants of the temple endowment ceremony lay out a pattern of divine living to help bring about these and other spiritual powers. The temple is a modern School of the Prophets in which we enter into a covenant order of future priests and priestesses. As we participate in the temple endowment ceremony, we experience and reenact a symbolic upward journey that takes each one of us, as a fallen person, to being

taught about the great plan of redemption, being empowered by knowledge and covenants, and ultimately being brought into the presence of God to become an heir of eternal life. The ceremony suggests growth and progression from glory to glory as we increase in light and truth and make priesthood covenants to guide us in living a holy life.

Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that in the temple

*we establish patterns of Christlike living. These include obedience, making sacrifices to keep the commandments, loving one another, being chaste in thought and action, and giving of ourselves to build the kingdom of God. Through the Savior’s Atonement and by following these basic patterns of faithfulness, we receive “power from on high” to face the challenges of life. We need this divine power today more than ever.<sup>8</sup>*

Or, in the more recent words of President Russell M. Nelson, “As we keep our covenants, [God] endows us with *His . . .* power. And oh, how we will need His power in the days ahead.”<sup>9</sup>

### **The Power of Temple Covenants**

To show how the major temple covenants can facilitate the spiritual power that we so desperately need, I am going to describe five challenges we might face as we continue in the Restoration and how the five temple covenants can address them. These five temple covenants have been publicly published by the Church in numerous places, and Church leaders encourage us to understand them.<sup>10</sup> So now come back to the present. Mentally take off your bonnet or shave that beard, and let’s look at how these covenants can empower us to meet some of the challenges we are facing today.

#### **1. The Law of Obedience**

We live in a time that almost worships individuality, highlighted by the profound modern philosophical slogan of “Hey, you do you!” We are force-fed day and night across social media, mass marketing, and political agendas with well-intended messages such as “Follow your own path,” “Don’t let anyone tell you what to do,” “Be independent,” and “Have it your way.” These

self-affirming but self-centric messages can be worthwhile in small doses, given the situation, but consumed at today’s societal rate, we may be overdosing on ourselves.

Christian theologian George MacDonald called the attitude of being “my own king and my own subject . . . doing whatever I am inclined to do, from whatever quarter may come the inclination” one of the “principles of hell.”<sup>11</sup> Why? Because it stands in such stark contrast to Jesus’s perfect, lifelong submission to God, defined by “not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). While a common refrain today might be “You do you,” Christ’s covenant call is “Be like me.” There is power in covenanting that we will obey the laws of God and not merely walk in our own way after the image of our own god.

*Yes, we need an endowment!*

## 2. *The Law of Sacrifice*

We live in a world of fractured families and declining marriage. America recently hit its lowest marriage rate since the government began tracking it in 1867.<sup>12</sup> Based on U.S. census data, the estimated length of a marriage in America is just around twenty years.<sup>13</sup> Many young people want to establish eternal marriages and families but feel like the odds are stacked against them. What principle can help give us the power to meet this challenge? In the temple endowment ceremony, we make a covenant of sacrifice. The Church publicly explains this covenant to mean “sacrificing to support the Lord’s work and repenting with a broken heart and contrite spirit.”<sup>14</sup> What a key to relationships!

I am grateful that both my wife and I were taught the important of repentance and sacrifice. We grew up with each other and went to the same junior high and high school. When we reconnected after my mission, the subject of love came up on the first night that we talked with each other (don’t ask me how). I had concluded on my mission that the truest definition of love was “sacrifice.” In John 15:13, Jesus taught, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

In our conversation, I asked her what she thought love was.

She paused and then said something like, “I think the best way to describe love is with the word *sacrifice*.”

Wow. I kneeled down and asked her to marry me right there on the spot! (Not really—in reality we took our sweet time and got engaged less than two months later.) We have now been happily married for almost twenty-five years. Now that doesn’t mean it hasn’t been without some challenges. All marriages have them. But our covenant of sacrifice with God has motivated us to lay down our selfish lives to build our family life and thus build the kingdom. That’s true in any relationship. There is power in learning that enduring love for God and others is grown in the soil of sacrifice.

*Yes, we need an endowment!*

## 3. *The Law of the Gospel*

We live in an exciting yet challenging time of important social and political questions. There are many compelling voices—sometimes heading in different directions—each of which is equally convinced of the virtue of its position. A faith challenge can come when a personal view conflicts with Church teachings. How do we handle this? The issue isn’t whether we may think differently—even Joseph Smith told people to not just agree with everything he said, saying “he did not want to be forever surrounded by a set of ‘dough heads.’”<sup>15</sup> The issue is how we go about handling that discussion when there are diverging views. Do we unfairly criticize, judge harshly, level accusation without sufficient information, speak evil, or publicly belittle? If so, we lose spiritual power.

Returning to the 1835 meeting of Joseph Smith with the Quorum of the Twelve, he told them, “Do not watch for iniquity in each other. If you do, you will not get an endowment, for God will not bestow it on such.”<sup>16</sup> Instead, let’s counsel in the ways the Lord has laid out:

*in all righteousness, in holiness, and lowliness of heart, meekness and long-suffering, . . .*

*Because the promise is, if these things abound in [us, we] shall not be unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord. [Doctrine and Covenants 107:30–31]*

There is power in living the higher teachings of Jesus Christ as taught in His marvelous gospel—to not judge or revile, to love, to pray for, to forgive, to extend mercy, and to make peace.

*Yes, we need an endowment!*

#### 4. *The Law of Chastity*

We live in a time of sexual permissiveness. A 2020 Pew Research Center study reported that of religiously unaffiliated Americans, 84 percent said that casual sex is sometimes or always acceptable between consenting adults. Even among Christians, 50 percent reported that they think it is permissible.<sup>17</sup> In our day, pornography is everywhere, easily accessible, and rationalized by some to be relatively harmless. We need the power more than ever to resist getting caught up in this tsunami of sexual leniency and the damage it leaves in its wake. While some want to remove moral limits from sexual expression, time and experience show that power without bounds is the foundation of both corruption and chaos. And there is almost nothing more powerful than the power to create life. Remember, even God has boundaries in which He abides and won't cross, or He "would cease to be God" (Alma 42:22, 25), as the Book of Mormon teaches. Could you imagine trying to have faith in an immoral and unrestrained God? Neither can I! And we are here to learn to become more like Him.

We need eyes to see that the covenant of chastity is about more than sex; it is about learning to develop a character that can be trusted, exercises restraint, respects boundaries, won't selfishly abuse power, and has the ability to create and maintain a covenant family. Whether we are single, dating, or married—young or old—there is divine power in developing a truly moral character.

*Yes, we need an endowment!*

#### 5. *The Law of Consecration*

We live in a world in which there is a lot of pressure to be someone important, to do something big, to have a platform, and to be successful. The word *successful* itself carries the cultural weight of expectations. If I say, "Have you heard about David lately? He has really become

*successful,*" what is the definition of *success* that you and I have become conditioned to think of? We think David must be rich, has become famous, has lots of followers, or has some real position and prestige. He must be *killing it* doing summer sales. Right? Hardly any of us probably think, "Oh, wonderful! David must have become really full of love and dedicated to serving God and his fellow men and women." The desire to be something in the eyes of everyone else can taint our motives, lead us to rationalize away ethical standards, justify our stepping on and overlooking other people in our desperate climb to the top, and cause us to miss our true life's mission.

Speaking personally, I almost missed out on my own vocational career that I felt called by God to pursue because, as a young adult, I was understandably yet overly concerned about living on a teacher's salary. I rationalized to myself that I wanted wealth and prestige so that I could do good things for others and provide opportunities for my family. But if I am being honest, pride and my own desire to be praised by others were also part of the equation and were tainting my heart. I am grateful that God corrected me.

Now don't get me wrong. This isn't about money and fame or position and prominence. Many great Saints have all of those and more. That's not the issue. The issue is about what we love and where our heart is. The temple teaches us as its highest pinnacle covenant to consecrate our entire lives to God, dedicating and making holy our time, talents, and means to do His will and build His kingdom. It teaches us to love and serve others, offering of our abundance to help those in need. For all of you here who may be uncertain about your major—yes, I'm talking to you who have switched it four times—the temple tells you what to major in. Major in consecration, and as you dedicate your heart to love and to serve God and your fellow men and women, you will know what to do with your time, talents, and gifts that you have abundantly been given. There is power in consecrating our lives in the service of God and His children that enables us to find our personal path and purpose.

*Yes, we need an endowment!*

These are just a few examples. There are many more ways we can be endowed with power through learning and then diligently living the covenants and concepts communicated through the temple endowment ceremony. After a recent endowment session, I sat down and privately wrote down forty spiritual powers that I felt the endowment could facilitate in my life if I followed its holy teachings. And that barely scratches the surface. There is so much that an all-powerful God wants to bestow upon His covenant children.

### Holy Patterns

We may be tempted to think that this kind of power only applies to other people. But God’s power is very personal and can be received by everyday Saints like you and me if we will learn the patterns and implement the covenant concepts.

Let me illustrate, literally, with an illustration. Some of you may know that I am an artist and that I paint religious themes. See this painting of Jesus? [A painting of Christ was shown.]

Well, I didn’t paint this one. A seven-year-old did—one who had never painted Jesus before. Now, even more amazing, she painted this image in one hour. And it’s not because she’s a modern-day Monet. (Well, maybe she is; I don’t know. Time will tell!) How was she able to do it? She could do it because she followed some basic patterns of instruction that I had laid out for her and some other children in a Primary activity.

I created a linocut that the kids stamped on some prepared boards. That gave them the outline to start with. Then I taught them some basic principles about highlights, midtones, and shadows. I gave them one color at a time, starting with the cadmium yellow highlights. I modeled and showed them where and how to lay the paint down.

At first they were a little nervous and even confused at my instruction. But they faithfully followed along closely, bit by bit and brushstroke by brushstroke.

Next they received their midtone yellow ochre, and I showed them how and where to paint it in the center of the face. Then the same for the burnt sienna shadow color. When they messed up, I

quoted them some wise Bob Ross reminders—such as “There are no mistakes, only happy accidents”<sup>18</sup>—and helped get them get back on track. Last of all, we filled in the Savior’s white shirt and red robe and topped it all off with a contrasting background color to make it pop.

They started getting so excited to see it come together. One boy said, “Hey, it looks like a real-life Jesus!”

Some of their parents couldn’t believe their kids had done this themselves. But by learning and following the basic patterns that were shown to them, all of them had the ability to paint Jesus.

Similarly, by implementing the holy patterns laid out in the sacred temple endowment ceremony, all of us can develop the power and capacity to become like Jesus. In successive colors of covenants and concepts, the temple endowment presents Him to us and shows us how to follow Him. We may be confused at first, but as we are faithful, we excitedly begin to see Him come together in every aspect and covenant of the temple. Who has been more obedient to God, sacrificed more, lived a holier life, and been more chaste and consecrated than Jesus? And as we live the temple’s teachings, we slowly begin to recognize something that looks like the real-life Jesus in ourselves.

*Yes, we need an endowment!*

Although these Primary kids were able to follow a simple pattern of instruction to produce an image of Jesus, they will only become great artists if they continue to learn the concepts of art and repeatedly practice them over time. Power and capacity don’t come in a single class. We wish they would, but they simply can’t. We must consistently put in the work.

Becoming endowed with divine power is a little bit like going through a university program or degree. Just because we have been accepted doesn’t make us educated. The education comes slowly, even painfully—especially when everything is due at the same time around finals. Right? Rarely does learning come dramatically or all at once. Most of it comes almost imperceptibly over time. The tuition of education is paid by persistence. But because of dedicated diligence, those who are getting ready to graduate in a few

weeks have developed more power and capacity in their respective lives and fields than they had just a few years ago when they excitedly posted #BYUbound. In the Lord's School of the Prophets—the temple—we similarly grow in power and capacity by degrees as we learn and diligently implement the holy covenants and concepts over time.

You and I may fail to understand some assignments. The temple textbook often requires a lot of rereading to grasp the meaning. But the Master Teacher's rubric of standards is very clear. This most blessed Professor holds open-door office hours every day, and He is more than happy to revise your grade as you redo the assignments again and again as you figure things out. He believes in mastery learning, and His semester never ends. But stop skipping or sleeping through His class, and don't you dare drop out because you think it's too hard or too confusing or not for you! Go to His class again and again and let Him teach you. You will find yourself learning and growing and becoming endowed with more divine power and capacity as you do.

*Yes, we need an endowment!*

### **Continue in the Restoration**

So, my dear friends, the Restoration continues. Make the choice today that you will continue in it.

You will need an endowment of spiritual power and capacity to do this.

The temple endowment ceremony communicates the concepts and covenants to facilitate this greater power.

Just as the children learned to follow patterns while painting Christ, worship in the temple and learn the patterns and the process to become more like Jesus.

When you leave the temple, be a diligent student and consciously strive to practice those covenants and concepts in everyday life. Put in the work—practice, start again, realign, increase in your precision—and don't you ever give up. God does not give up on you. Don't you give up on Him.

As we act in faith, God promises to truly endow us with His power, even the power necessary to overcome the spiritual challenges

of our day so that we can enter into the presence of God and receive a fullness of His exalted blessings. Let us go forth and truly receive our endowment—even our endowment of increased spiritual power.

Are you willing and ready to do so and thus continue in the ongoing Restoration? If you are, remember how I close each class? Let's close this devotional that same way:

The Restoration continues!

Let us continue in it!

I invite us all to do so through the temple endowment of power and in the sacred name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ, amen.

### **Notes**

1. See Gregory A. Smith, "About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated," Pew Research Center, 14 December 2021, [pewresearch.org/religion/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated](https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated).

2. See "The Age Gap in Religion Around the World," Report, Pew Research Center, 13 June 2018, [pewresearch.org/religion/2018/06/13/the-age-gap-in-religion-around-the-world](https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/06/13/the-age-gap-in-religion-around-the-world).

3. Joseph Smith, "Discourse, 12 November 1835," Kirtland, Ohio, *Journal, September 1835–April 1836*, 31, JSP; punctuation modernized.

4. Smith, "Discourse," 33; capitalization and punctuation modernized.

5. Smith, "Discourse," 34.

6. See Merriam-Webster online dictionary, s.v. "endowment": "natural capacity, power, or ability"; also the Free Dictionary online, s.v. "endowment": "a natural gift, ability, or quality."

7. See Joseph Smith Papers glossary summary of "endowment," [josephsmithpapers.org/topic/endowment](https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/topic/endowment); see also Doctrine and Covenants 38:32; 39:15; 43:16; 95:8–9; 110:8–10.

8. Robert D. Hales, "Coming to Ourselves: The Sacrament, the Temple, and Sacrifice in Service," *Ensign*, May 2012; quoting Doctrine and Covenants 95:8.

9. Russell M. Nelson, "The Temple and Your Spiritual Foundation," *Liahona*, November 2021; emphasis in original.

10. See "The Endowment," *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ*

of *Latter-day Saints*, July 2021 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ, 2021), 27.2 (pp. 241–42), [churchofjesuschrist.org](http://churchofjesuschrist.org); see also “Prophetic Teachings on Temples,” Temples, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, [churchofjesuschrist.org/temples/prophetic-teachings-on-temples?lang=eng](http://churchofjesuschrist.org/temples/prophetic-teachings-on-temples?lang=eng).

11. George MacDonald, “Kingship,” *Unspoken Sermons: Third Series* (1889).

12. See Gaby Galvin, “U.S. Marriage Rate Hits Historic Low,” *U.S. News and World Report*, 29 April 2020, [usnews.com/news/healthiest-communities/articles/2020-04-29/us-marriage-rate-drops-to-record-low](https://www.usnews.com/news/healthiest-communities/articles/2020-04-29/us-marriage-rate-drops-to-record-low).

13. See B12504: “Median Duration of Current Marriage in Years by Sex by Marital Status for the Married Population 15 Years and Over,” 2020: ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, American

Community Survey, United States Census Bureau, [data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=marriage%20duration&tid=ACSDT5Y2020.B12504](https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=marriage%20duration&tid=ACSDT5Y2020.B12504).

14. *General Handbook*, 27.2 (p. 242).

15. Joseph Smith, in “Minutes, 10 March 1844,” Council of Fifty, “Record,” Nauvoo, Illinois, 24, JSP.

16. Smith, “Discourse,” 33; punctuation and capitalization modernized.

17. See Jeff Diamant, “Half of U.S. Christians Say Casual Sex Between Consenting Adults Is Sometimes or Always Acceptable,” Pew Research Center, 31 August 2020, [pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/08/31/half-of-u-s-christians-say-casual-sex-between-consenting-adults-is-sometimes-or-always-acceptable](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/08/31/half-of-u-s-christians-say-casual-sex-between-consenting-adults-is-sometimes-or-always-acceptable).

18. Robert Norman Ross (Bob Ross), *The Joy of Painting*, Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), 1983–1994.