

Stronger and Closer Connection to God Through Multiple Covenants

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Brothers and sisters, thank you for being here. Thank you for your faith and your faithfulness. Thank you for your goodness and your examples. I am very grateful for the chorus that we have heard as they sang about our Lord¹—your Redeemer and my Redeemer, your Savior and my Savior, our “kind, wise heav’nly Friend.”² I am grateful for them, and I am grateful for those who have made this event possible.

Today I have invited Brother Gabriel Abello, Sister Emma Rae Francis, and Sister Kate McConlogue, who are seated to my left, to help me introduce my topic. For this demonstration, I want you to consider that these three individuals represent all the children of God who have come to earth. The children of God are beloved of God and are guaranteed immortality because of the Savior’s Resurrection. They need do nothing for these blessings to be realized.

But they do not want to remain simply beloved children of God; they want to grow up and become co-inheritors with Jesus Christ of all that

Heavenly Father has. And they do not want to simply be guaranteed immortality; they want to receive eternal life, the kind of life Heavenly Father has. For these additional blessings to be realized, they each need to do something. They need to make and keep covenants with God.

The Covenant Path

The covenants God established are based on eternal, unchanging law. There is only one way to return to live with God, and it is designated as the *covenant path*. The phrase *covenant path* refers to the series of covenants through which we come unto Christ and connect to Him and our Heavenly Father.³ Making and keeping covenants is how we reconcile ourselves to God.⁴ These covenants are nonnegotiable. They transform, save, and exalt us. We make them by participating in priesthood ordinances. In return for keeping these covenants, God guarantees us certain blessings.⁵ A covenant is a pledge that we should prepare for, clearly understand, and absolutely honor.⁶

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For everyone, the covenant path starts with the covenant of baptism.⁷ For men, the covenant path includes the essential step of receiving the Melchizedek Priesthood. For all, the covenant path continues with the covenants in the temple endowment,⁸ which encompasses five covenants. These five covenants, however, are not separable—you cannot choose to make a subset of the five; you make all five or none. The final covenant we make with God in the temple is the one that is made when a man and a woman are sealed together in the new and everlasting covenant of marriage.⁹

Why are multiple covenants needed? It is because the multiple covenants are not only sequential but are also additive and even synergistic in our relationship with God. Each covenant adds a bond, drawing us closer to and strengthening our connection with God.

To demonstrate this, we brought these exercise bands. Brother Abello, Sister Francis, and Sister McConlogue are going to stand here, and they are going to face Sister Renlund. Now, bend your arms, and Sister Renlund will loop the exercise bands over your wrists. Notice that Sister Renlund loops the red band only once around Brother Abello's wrists. She loops the yellow band twice around Sister Francis's wrists. Finally, she loops the green band three times around Sister McConlogue's wrists. Sister McConlogue's wrists have the greatest probability of becoming ischemic!

Now, see how far you can easily stretch your hands apart. Then see who has the easiest time slipping one hand from the band. As you can see, Brother Abello has the easiest time stretching his hands apart and pulling a hand out from the band. It is most difficult for Sister McConlogue and intermediate for Sister Francis.

This simple demonstration is metaphorically what happens when we make and keep multiple covenants with God; we are drawn closer to Him and develop a stronger bond with Him. But what about those who choose not to make multiple covenants with God? A certain risk to achieving one's eternal destiny may creep in. So, before we look at the exercise bands again, let's look at the effect of risk factors in predicting negative outcomes. This

will take all of us into beginning statistics courses. Some of us, like President Reese, will experience a sense of euphoric nostalgia—and others of us will develop, or redevelop, hives.

To avoid discussing risk in the abstract, let me discuss risk factors in the context of heart disease. Risk factors for having a heart attack include being male, growing older, tobacco use, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, high blood sugar, and a family history of heart attacks.

There are some of these risk factors that I cannot do anything about. I am male. I am not going to do anything about that. I am seventy-one years old, and I am growing older. I cannot do anything about that, and I do not like the alternative. My father had a heart attack at age seventy-seven. I cannot choose healthier parents. However, if I am wise, I control the things that I can control to minimize my risk of having a heart attack. I do not smoke, I monitor my blood pressure, I treat my high cholesterol, I try to maintain an ideal body weight, and my blood sugar is periodically checked. In fact, despite being seventy-one, through diet and exercise I have the body of a seventy-year-old.

Risk factors are not determinative of heart health though. Even a person with multiple cardiovascular risk factors can mitigate the risk by taking appropriate measures. And even individuals with no known risk factors for a heart attack have heart attacks. Known risk factors account for only approximately 50 percent of heart attacks. Not having a risk factor does not mean we will never have a heart attack; it simply means we are less likely than we otherwise would be.

Now that we have briefly reviewed how risk factors work, let us apply the idea of risk factors to the effect of making multiple covenants along the covenant path. When we make the first covenant, baptism, we form a bond with God.

Let's have Brother Abello stand and have Sister Renlund loop the red band once around his arms. Consider that one hand represents God and the other represents you, Brother Abello. This one loop represents the bond that is made with God when we are baptized and confirmed. See how easy it is for you to move away from God. Move your arms apart but don't break the covenant.

Also, check to see how easy it is for you to slip a hand out from the covenantal bond.

Sister Renlund will again loop the yellow band twice around the arms of Sister Francis. The two loops represent making two covenants: baptism and the endowment. For simplicity, I am grouping the five covenants in the endowment as one. Sister Francis, see how easy it is for you to move away from God. Stretch your hands apart and see how easy it is for you to slip a hand out from the covenantal bond. Now put them back. When we have been both baptized and endowed, we have less risk of wandering away from God.

Finally, Sister Renlund will loop the green band three times around Sister McConlogue's arms. This represents adding the sealing to a spouse to the covenants of baptism and the endowment. Now, compared to Sister Francis, it is even harder for Sister McConlogue to move away from God. It is also harder for her to slip her hand out and separate herself from God. When we add the sealing to a spouse to baptism and the endowment, we further decrease our risk of separating ourselves from God because the bond is stronger and draws us closer. In other words, making multiple covenants along the covenant path helps us mature in our discipleship.

President Russell M. Nelson suggests that we deepen our relationship with God when we make multiple covenants. He said:

*God has a special love for each person who makes a covenant with Him in the waters of baptism. And that divine love deepens as additional covenants are made and faithfully kept.*¹⁰

This means that we develop a stronger and closer connection to God through those multiple covenants. When we confront life's challenges, the likelihood is decreased that we distance ourselves from God.¹¹

1. Baptism

Baptism is the first covenant that everyone makes on the covenant path. The baptismal covenant is a public witness to Heavenly Father of three specific commitments: to serve God, to keep His commandments, and to be willing to

take on the name of Jesus Christ.¹² The other facets that are frequently associated with the baptismal covenant—that we “bear one another’s burdens,” “mourn with those that mourn,” and “comfort those that [are] in need of comfort”¹³—are fruits of making the covenant rather than part of the actual covenant. These facets are important because they are what a converted soul would naturally do.

2. The Endowment

The next covenant that everyone makes on the covenant path is the endowment.¹⁴ As I mentioned, the endowment consists of five inseparable covenants. As I review each, see how they align with and reinforce aspects of the baptismal covenant.

First, we covenant in the endowment to “live the law of obedience,” which means that we “strive to keep Heavenly Father’s commandments.”¹⁵ This covenant aligns squarely under the baptismal covenant promise to keep God’s commandments.

Second, we covenant to “obey the law of sacrifice, which means sacrificing to support the Lord’s work and repenting with a broken heart and contrite spirit.”¹⁶ This covenant aligns with the baptismal promises to serve God and to keep His commandments. Additionally, repentance is a key aspect of taking on the name of Jesus Christ.

Third, we covenant to “obey the law of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”¹⁷ We do this, in part, by living the doctrine of Christ. This includes “making covenants with God by receiving the ordinances of salvation and exaltation” and keeping those covenants throughout our lives.¹⁸ The covenant includes “striving to live the two great commandments”: to love God and neighbor.¹⁹ This covenant aligns with all three aspects of the baptismal covenant.

Fourth, we covenant to keep God’s “law of chastity, which means abstaining from sexual relations outside of a legal marriage between a man and a woman.”²⁰

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said:

*Marriage was intended [by God] to mean the complete merger of a man and a woman—their hearts, hopes, lives, love, family, future, everything. . . . They were to be “one flesh” in their life together.*²¹

We cannot achieve the kind of life our Heavenly Father enjoys without a complete commitment to fidelity within a marriage to our husband or wife according to God’s plan. This covenant aligns with the aspect of the baptismal covenant to keep God’s commandments.

Fifth, we covenant to “keep the law of consecration,” meaning that we dedicate ourselves and everything the Lord blesses us with to build up His Church.²² The keys of the holy priesthood were restored so that priesthood ordinances could be performed, allowing us to make covenants with God. It is only through the restored Church of Jesus Christ that this can be done for God’s children on both sides of the veil. We pledge our support to God’s work. This covenant aligns with the aspect of the baptismal covenant to serve God. Additionally, this covenant aligns with taking on ourselves the name of Christ because we promise to permanently maintain a mightily changed heart.

3. The Sealing of a Woman and a Man Together

Now the stage is set for the covenant associated with the sealing of a woman and a man together. In this ordinance they receive promises, they make a covenant with each other, and they make a covenant with God. To review the promises, let us go back thousands of years. Abraham received the gospel²³ and entered into celestial marriage, which is the covenant of exaltation.²⁴ Abraham received a promise that all the blessings of his covenant would be offered to his mortal posterity.²⁵ Everyone who embarks on the covenant path becomes “Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”²⁶

When a man and a woman are sealed to each other, they are promised these blessings, just as Abraham was. The blessings include that they will

*come forth in the first resurrection; . . . inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions . . . ; and they shall pass by the angels . . . to their exaltation and glory in all things . . . , which glory shall be a fullness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever.*²⁷

During the sealing, a woman makes a covenant with her husband and a man makes a covenant with his wife. The tasks of mortality become joint.

Husband and wife both enter into an order of the priesthood that neither could enter singly and that is necessary to enter the highest degree of the celestial kingdom.²⁸ They serve each other and their children and thereby serve God. As a man and a woman are sealed, they covenant with God to keep all the commandments related to marriage in the new and everlasting covenant.

The elements of the endowment and the sealing align with and reinforce all three aspects of the baptismal covenant. Each aspect of the baptismal covenant and the covenants of the endowment and sealing overlap and mutually reinforce each other.

We are not forced or compelled in any way to stay in a covenantal relationship with God even after we choose to make these covenants.²⁹ When we make a covenantal bond with God, we share a covenant with Him. We experience and participate together in the covenant. This is also true for a woman and a man when they are sealed; they make a covenant with each other. I believe it is misleading to think that one is bound to the other for eternity; they are not enslaved, coerced, shackled, or under compulsion. Rather, they share and experience the covenant together. Agency continues to be an overriding component of eternal marriage.³⁰ No one will be forced to live in a marriage they do not choose or accept, even after the temple sealing.

Multiple Covenants Bind Us More Strongly to God

Like multiple loops of the exercise band, multiple covenants draw us closer to God and strengthen our connection to Him. The purpose of these bonds is to help us become more converted, faithful, and committed disciples of Jesus Christ. My personal experience suggests that, over time, the adults who have been baptized, endowed, and sealed to a spouse are the most likely to maintain and deepen their discipleship along the covenant path. Less likely to do so are the adults who have been baptized and endowed but are not sealed to a spouse. Least likely to maintain and deepen their discipleship over time are the adults who have been baptized but are not endowed. As our discipleship matures, we add the covenants of the endowment to our baptismal covenant. That binds

us more strongly to God. Then, if the blessing comes of being sealed to a spouse, the covenant bond can become even stronger.

Please remember, though, that risk factors are not determinative. You and I know individuals who have not been endowed who are remarkably faithful disciples of Christ, and we know those who have been sealed to a spouse who are not. Faithfulness is an individual choice about how we live the covenants we have made. Not being sealed to a spouse does not halt your progression in your discipleship to the Savior. As you continue being valiant to your testimony of Jesus Christ, your progression continues.

That said, as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, I have invitations for each of you. My invitation for those who have been baptized but who are not yet endowed is that you prepare for and receive your endowment. The decision to receive the endowment is personal and should be made prayerfully. It depends only on your agency—no one else’s. Further, it is not the role of anyone else—leaders, friends, peer groups, family, or me—to decide this for you or unduly influence you to do so. For most of you listening to me today, you meet all the criteria to be endowed if you feel a desire to receive and honor sacred temple covenants throughout your life.³¹

Until you are ready, continue to prepare. This includes doing family history work and qualifying for and using a temple recommend for proxy baptisms and confirmations. Also, focus intently on the covenant you have already made. Conscientiously partake of the sacrament weekly. If you choose to miss sacrament meeting when you could attend, you place yourself in spiritual jeopardy. Continue to faithfully live the gospel of Jesus Christ. As you accept this invitation, it will have the metaphorical effect of shrinking the red exercise band, drawing you closer to God.

Let us turn to those who have been baptized and endowed but who are not sealed to a spouse. We all know that being sealed to a spouse involves someone else’s agency. You do not determine this step solely on your own. My invitation focuses on what *you* can do.

If being sealed to a spouse is not yet your blessing to the extent that it involves your agency, do

not delay taking advantage of your opportunities. Do not close the door to the possibility. In May 2023, President Dallin H. Oaks taught:

*A loving Heavenly Father has a plan for His young adults, and part of that plan is marriage and children. . . . [Quoting himself from 2005:] “We counsel you to channel your associations with the opposite sex into dating patterns that have the potential to mature into marriage.”*³²

Remember, eternal life is not a question of current marital status but of discipleship; that is, being “valiant in the testimony of Jesus.”³³ You receive access to the grace of Christ through obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel. Additionally, I invite you to focus on the covenants you have made. Go to the temple often and participate in family history work. Conscientiously partake of the sacrament weekly. As you do, you will strengthen your connection with Jesus Christ.³⁴

To those who are never sealed to a spouse in this life or those whose sealing didn’t turn out as hoped, consider this comforting promise made by President Lorenzo Snow in 1899. Speaking of unmarried women, he stated:

*There seems to be considerable lamentation in regard to this condition. There is no need of this particularly. . . . [But] some very foolish doctrine has been presented to some of the sisters in regard to this and other things of a kindred nature. . . . There is no Latter-day Saint who dies after having lived a faithful life who will lose anything because of having failed to do certain things when opportunities were not furnished him or her. . . . They will have all the blessings, exaltation and glory that any man or woman will have who had this opportunity. . . . [They] will have means furnished them by which they can secure all the blessings necessary for persons in the married condition.*³⁵

I feel compelled to add that you should not obsess about whether you had the opportunity to be sealed to a spouse and missed it or that your sealing in a house of the Lord did not turn out as you hoped. Do not second guess yourself. God’s grace is sufficient for all. Anything “that is unfair

in life can [and will] be made right through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.”³⁶ As you accept this invitation, this too will have the metaphorical effect of shrinking the yellow exercise band, drawing you closer to God.

For those who have been sealed to a spouse, this sealing is a milestone in your life, not a bookend. You need to press forward and focus on the covenants you have made, just as I have encouraged the others to do: conscientiously partaking of the sacrament, worshipping in the temple, and doing family history work. In addition, seek to become a better spouse by acquiring Christlike attributes. Become the spouse your spouse deserves. If you are blessed to be a parent, become the parent your children deserve. As you accept this invitation, this too will have the metaphorical effect of shrinking the green exercise band, drawing you closer to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ and strengthening your covenantal bonds with Them.

Whether you have one, two, or three loops, heed the Savior’s caution:

But there is a possibility that man may fall from grace and depart from the living God;

Therefore let the church take heed and pray always, lest they fall into temptation;

*Yea, and even let those who are sanctified take heed also.*³⁷

God established multiple covenants to bless us, not condemn us. Focusing intently on the covenants we have made and preparing for the next one is the best way to prepare to receive all that Heavenly Father has. It is how we “think celestial.”³⁸ I testify that Jesus Christ is mighty to save. He desires a close relationship with you, even a covenantal relationship. I pray that you may make covenants with real intent and allow those covenants to bless you now and into the eternities. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Chart of Covenants

| | | BAPTISM | | |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | | Serve God | Keep God’s commandments | Take upon ourself the name of Jesus Christ |
| ENDOWMENT | Law of Obedience | | Keep God’s commandments | |
| | Law of Sacrifice | Sacrifice to support the Lord in His work | Repent with a broken heart and contrite spirit | Sacrifice and repent |
| | Law of the Gospel of Jesus Christ | Love God and neighbor | Make and keep covenants | Live the doctrine of Christ |
| | Law of Chastity | | Keep God’s law of chastity | |
| | Law of Consecration | Dedicate all to build up the Lord’s Church | | Have a changed heart and countenance |
| SEALING | | Serve each other and their children and thereby serve God | Keep all commandments related to marriage in the new and everlasting covenant | Become like the Savior, leading to exaltation, which is the highest state of happiness and glory in the celestial kingdom |

Notes

1. The BYU Men's Chorus performed an arrangement of the hymn "I Need Thee Every Hour"; see *Hymns*, 2002, no. 98.

2. "I Know That My Redeemer Lives," *Hymns*, 2002, no. 136.

3. See David A. Bednar, "Bound to the Savior Through Covenants," *For the Strength of Youth*, February 2022.

4. A simple confession or an acknowledgment of a belief in God is not enough. While we reconcile ourselves to the will of God by covenant, we do not save ourselves. In the words of the Book of Mormon prophet Jacob, "Remember, after ye are reconciled unto God, that it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved" (2 Nephi 10:24). Even after we have made and kept these multiple covenants with God, we are only saved by grace despite all we can do. Reconciliation to God by covenant is like making a treaty between two parties who have been at odds with each other.

5. See Guide to the Scriptures, s.v. "covenant," Church of Jesus Christ.

6. We make a covenant only when we intend to commit ourselves quite exceptionally to fulfilling it. See Robert Bolt, *A Man for All Seasons: A Play in Two Acts* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), xiii–xiv, 140 (act 2).

7. See 2 Nephi 31:17–18. For men, the covenant path includes receiving the Melchizedek Priesthood.

8. See David A. Bednar, "Honorably Hold a Name and Standing," *Ensign*, May 2009. The process is probably not complete until "we shall be like him" (Moroni 7:48), when we have fully been transformed.

9. See Doctrine and Covenants 131:1–4.

10. Russell M. Nelson, "Choices for Eternity," worldwide devotional for young adults, 15 May 2022.

11. See Nelson, "Choices for Eternity." President Nelson concluded his statement by promising, "Then at the end of mortal life, precious is the reunion of each covenant child with our Heavenly Father." See Psalm 116:15.

12. See 2 Nephi 31:7, 13–14; Mosiah 18:10; 21:32, 35; Doctrine and Covenants 20:37.

13. Mosiah 18:8, 9.

14. The Melchizedek Priesthood is a covenantal requirement for faithful men.

15. "The Endowment," *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, August 2023 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ, 2023), 27.2.

16. "The Endowment," 27.2.

17. "The Endowment," 27.2.

18. "The Endowment," 27.2.

19. "The Endowment," 27.2. See Matthew 22:37, 39.

20. "The Endowment," 27.2.

21. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Personal Purity," *Ensign*, November 1998; quoting Genesis 2:24; see also verse 23. See also David A. Bednar, "We Believe in Being Chaste," *Ensign*, May 2013; Dale G. Renlund and Ruth Lybbert Renlund, "The Divine Purposes of Sexual Intimacy," *Ensign*, August 2020.

22. "The Endowment," 27.2; see also David A. Bednar, "Let This House Be Built unto My Name," *Ensign*, May 2020.

23. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:14; Abraham 2:11.

24. See Doctrine and Covenants 131:1–4; 132:19, 29.

25. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:29–31; Abraham 2:6–11.

26. Galatians 3:29; see also verses 26–29.

27. Doctrine and Covenants 132:19; see also verse 20.

28. See Doctrine and Covenants 131:1–4.

29. Agency remains operative. We are free to break our covenants and altogether turn from them, but the consequences are dire. See Jeremiah 17:5; Ezekiel 18:26; 33:12, 18; Malachi 2:1–5; Matthew 7:27; 12:45; 13:21; Luke 12:47; Hebrews 6:4–8; 10:26–27; 2 Peter 2:22; Alma 24:30; 47:36; Helaman 12:2; Doctrine and Covenants 82:3; 84:41, 54.

30. As President Dallin H. Oaks said in general conference:

We also know that [God] will force no one into a sealing relationship against his or her will. The blessings of a sealed relationship are assured for all who keep their covenants but never by forcing a sealed relationship on another person who is unworthy or unwilling. ["Kingdoms of Glory," Liahona, November 2023]

31. In the *General Handbook* we read:

Members may choose to receive their own endowment when they meet all of the following conditions:

- *They are at least 18 years old.*
- *They have completed or are no longer attending high school, secondary school, or the equivalent.*
- *One full year has passed since their confirmation.*
- *They feel a desire to receive and honor sacred temple covenants throughout their lives.*

[“Deciding When to Receive the Endowment,” 27.2.2]

32. Dallin H. Oaks in Dallin H. Oaks and Kristen M. Oaks, “Stand for Truth,” worldwide devotional for young adults, 21 May 2023; quoting himself from remarks given to young single adults at a Church Educational System fireside telecast from Oakland, California, on May 1, 2005. Also in excerpted article from the telecast, Dallin H. Oaks, “Dating Versus Hanging Out,” *Ensign*, June 2006.

33. Doctrine and Covenants 76:79; see also 121:29. See also M. Russell Ballard, “Hope in Christ,” *Liahona*, May 2021.

34. See 3 Nephi 18:12–13.

35. Lorenzo Snow, 8 May 1899, St. George, Utah, in “Discourse by President Lorenzo Snow,” *Millennial Star* 61, no. 35 (31 August 1899): 547; text of the discourse is continued from *Millennial Star* 61, no. 34 (24 August 1899): 529–33.

Referring to his sister, Eliza R. Snow, President Snow said:

She lived in an unmarried state until she was beyond the condition of raising a family. She was sealed to Joseph Smith, the Prophet; but she had no children to bear her name among the children of men. I cannot for one moment imagine that she will lose a single thing on that account. It will be made up to her in the other life, and she will have just as great a kingdom as she would have had if she had had the opportunity in this life of raising a family. [p. 548]

36. PMG, 2023, 48.

37. Doctrine and Covenants 20:32–34.

38. Russell M. Nelson, “Think Celestial!” *Liahona*, November 2023.