

AUSTRALIA LOCAL PAGES

LEADERSHIP MESSAGE

Delighting In Our Sabbath Day Observance in the Home

By **Linda K. Burton**

Relief Society General President

My beloved brothers and sisters, I count it a sacred privilege to speak to you today as you gather together in your various wards, stakes, branches and districts to watch or listen to this broadcast. I have been trying hard to envision your beautiful faces in anticipation of this sweet opportunity. Because my father served as a mission president

in New Zealand many years ago, I had the privilege as a young teenager to attend the Church College of New Zealand and live in the dorms adjacent to the beautiful New Zealand Temple. It was there I grew to love friends from all over the Pacific Islands. I thank those of you who played a special part in my life during those interesting teen years.

Additionally, it was a great blessing to me to return on assignment to your beautiful area a couple of years ago with Sister Rosemary Wixom, general Primary president. This past year, our Relief Society presidency was privileged to meet in a video conference with your inspired Area Presidency and area seventies. I want you to know that



*Linda K. Burton,
Relief Society
general president*



I know these are men called of God and are serving Him as they serve you.

Today it is my great privilege to accompany Elder James Hamula and Elder Quentin L. Cook. We have sought the Lord to know what He would have us say to you today. We pray for your faith and prayers—especially for the gift of the Holy Ghost. We know that ultimately the Holy Ghost is the real teacher, not us. As we feel His Spirit, we know we will each come away from this broadcast knowing what we can do to better live our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ. I testify that Elder Hamula and Elder Cook are chosen servants and dedicated disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ and plead with you to listen, learn and live what the Spirit has already taught you and will yet teach you through them.

In a recent general conference Elder Russell M. Nelson asked, “What did the Savior mean when He said that ‘the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath?’ [Mark 2:27].” He then answered his own question, “I believe He wanted us to understand that the Sabbath was His gift to us.”¹

What are some things that you could or should do to show gratitude to someone who gives you a gift? What did *you* do the last time someone gave a gift to you? Did you express gratitude in words, either written

or spoken aloud with sincerity and deep feeling? Did you use the gift to show that you value, cherish and appreciate it? For example, did you hang a piece of artwork one of your children or grandchildren made especially for you? Have you worn a piece of clothing someone made or purchased for you as a gift? Did you take time to read a letter or card given as a gift?

I am sorry to admit that as a newlywed on our first Christmas together as husband and wife, I failed to show sincere and appropriate appreciation for a gift my husband gave to me. We had agreed that since we had very little money and needed to save our resources to provide the very necessities to sustain life, we would not give each other gifts for Christmas that year. However, my sweet husband noticed that I needed a new pair of shoes. My old ones were beyond saving, and so he surprised me with a brand-new pair of brown shoes at great sacrifice to himself. But guess what. They weren’t the kind of shoes I would have chosen for myself. As a very young and immature bride, I felt they looked like “brown grandma shoes.” And instead of wearing them to show how much I appreciated my husband’s thoughtfulness or expressing gratitude in word or deed, I instead returned them to the department store, which hurt his feelings, I’m sure.

Did my husband give me a bad gift? Certainly not! It was a good gift given with great love. Did I turn the good gift into a bad gift by not accepting it in the spirit in which it was given? If I am to be perfectly honest, I must admit that I did turn a good gift into a bad gift—simply because of the attitude with which I received it.

I wish I had known then what I know now about good gifts. In the New Testament we read what Jesus Christ has to say about the gifts God gives us. In Matthew 7 we read:

“What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

“Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (verses 9–11).

This brings us back, then, to Elder Nelson’s feeling about the Sabbath day being a gift from our Heavenly Father. Is this a bad gift? Of course not! The Lord is perfect and gives only good gifts to His children—to us! He loves us and knows what is best for us and wants to bless us with the best gifts. However, we can turn the precious gift of the Sabbath day into a bad gift by not receiving it or using it as it is intended—to bless our lives.

President James E. Faust, who served as a counsellor to President Gordon B. Hinckley in the First Presidency, shared three reasons he felt that God gave us the Sabbath day as a gift. He said: “The first has to do with the physical need for rest and renewing. Obviously God, who created us, would know more than we do of the limits of our physical and nervous energy and strength.” He then continued:

“The second reason is, in my opinion, of far greater significance. It has to do with the need for regeneration and the strengthening of our spiritual being. God knows that, left completely to our own devices without regular reminders of our spiritual needs, many would degenerate into the preoccupation of satisfying earthly desires and appetites. . . .

“The third reason may be the most important of the three,” President Faust said. “It has to do with obedience to commandments as an expression of our love for God. Blessed are those who need no reasons other than their love for the Savior to keep his commandments.”²

So what can we do in our homes to show that we accept and appreciate the Sabbath day as a gift from Him?

We could begin by making sure that we give a sign to the Lord that we recognize that the Sabbath day

What signs do we give to those we love to demonstrate we love, respect and cherish our relationship with them?



is actually *His* day and not ours. The scriptures teach us that the Lord has asked us repeatedly to give Him a sign that we will keep His day holy. Let’s look at a couple of those references given in the Old Testament in both the books of Exodus and Ezekiel. Notice also that the Lord acknowledges that the Sabbath belongs to Him as He refers to the Sabbath as “*my*” Sabbath, which indeed it is!

Exodus 31:13: “*My* sabbaths ye shall keep: for *it is a sign between me and*

you throughout your generations” (emphasis added).

Exodus 31:16–17: “Keep the sabbath . . . for a perpetual covenant. *It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever*” (emphasis added).

Ezekiel 20:20: “Hallow *my* sabbaths; and they shall be *a sign between me and you*, that ye may know that I am the Lord your God” (emphasis added).

What signs do we give to those we love to demonstrate we love, respect and cherish our relationship

with them? We might honour them on a birthday by eating foods they choose, allowing them to choose what activities they most enjoy or listening to music they prefer, among other things. These things demonstrate we love, respect and honour them. A personal example illustrates what I am trying to teach.

While we were serving our mission in Korea a few years ago, my husband was deeply touched and felt greatly honoured to learn how our family had chosen to remember and honour him on his birthday, although they were thousands of miles away. All of our children and grandchildren gathered together and went to my husband's favourite restaurant, ate his favourite kind of food and dessert to remember and honour him in his absence. This was a sign between our family and my husband that they remembered him on his special day. Similarly, we can give a sign to the Lord that we remember Him on His sacred day as we do what He would like us to do and offer it voluntarily and with great love.

What kinds of things might we choose to do on the Lord's day in our homes to show we love and honour Him? The scriptures can help us know what kinds of gifts He would prefer and the kinds of activities He would like us to do. I don't know about you, but for me, I find it very hard to

give gifts to others that I feel would be meaningful to them without some sort of idea of what it is they would like to receive.

In section 59 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord shares with us some of the things that matter most to Him. It seems that if we really want to honour Him on His day, we will try to incorporate these things into our Sabbath day observance. In verses 3 and 4, we read that obedience and faithfulness and diligence before the Lord are things He desires of us. In verses 5 and 6, we see that He wants



us to love Him with all our heart, might, mind and strength and that He wants us to love our neighbours and keep the commandments. In verse 7, we learn that He wants us to give thanks for all we have. Verse 8 tells us that offering the sacrifice of a broken heart and contrite spirit are meaningful gifts to Him.

All these gifts He desires of us will help us stay unspotted from the world and precede the counsel we are most familiar with that comes in verse 9: "And that thou mayest *more fully* keep thyself unspotted from the world, thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon *my* holy day" (emphasis added).

As I share the following story with you that appeared in a Church magazine a few years ago, consider what this sister learned from her service in the temple that could apply to keeping ourselves "unspotted from the world" on the Sabbath day, particularly as we apply that phrase in our homes.

"A few years ago, I arrived at the Bountiful Utah Temple to fulfill a late-night cleaning assignment. The turnout for the assignment was impressive, and I wondered for a moment if some would be sent home. I was more than ready to volunteer to leave early. Then I cynically thought to myself, 'Of course they won't let us go early. They will find menial jobs for all of

us, thinking it is their duty to keep us here the entire two hours.’ I remembered a previous assignment during which I had dusted for more than an hour, only to return a cloth that looked as clean as it had been when it was given to me. I prepared myself to spend two hours cleaning things that didn’t appear to need cleaning. Obviously, I had come to the temple that night out of a sense of duty more than from a desire to serve.

“Our group was led to a small chapel for a devotional. The custodian who conducted the devotional said something that will forever change the way I look at temple cleaning assignments. After welcoming us, he proceeded to explain that we were not there to clean things that didn’t need cleaning but to keep the Lord’s house from ever becoming dirty. As stewards of one of the most sacred places on earth, we had a responsibility to keep it spotless.

“His message penetrated my heart, and I proceeded to my assigned area with a new enthusiasm to protect the Lord’s house. I spent time with a soft-bristled paintbrush, dusting the tiny grooves in door frames, baseboards, and the legs of tables and chairs. Had I been given this assignment on an earlier visit, I might have thought it ridiculous and carelessly brushed over the areas in an effort to appear busy.



“Does the way I observe the Sabbath day more resemble the world’s way of keeping it or the way the Lord intended it to be kept?”

But this time, I made sure the bristles reached into the tiniest of crevices.

“Because this job was neither physically nor mentally taxing, I was blessed with time to ponder while I worked. I first realized that I never paid attention to such minute details in my own home but cleaned those areas that others would see first, neglecting those known only to members of my family and me.

“I next realized that there were times when I had lived the gospel in

a similar fashion—living those principles and fulfilling those assignments that were most obvious to those around me while ignoring things that seemed known only to my immediate family or me. I attended church, held callings, fulfilled assignments, went visiting teaching—all in full view of members of our ward—but neglected to attend the temple regularly, have personal and family scripture study and prayer, and hold family home evening. I taught lessons and spoke in church but sometimes lacked true charity in my heart when it came to interactions with others.

“That night in the temple, I studied the paintbrush in my hand and asked myself, ‘What are the little crevices in my life that need more attention?’ I resolved that rather than plan to repeatedly *clean* the areas of my life that needed attention, I would try harder never to let them become dirty.”³

If I were physically present with you in your meetinghouses today, I would stop at this point and ask you to quietly ponder in your heart for a few minutes what the Spirit is teaching you right now. How does this story I have just shared apply to you? What are the places in your personal lives or in your family lives that you need to be sure to keep clean so they will never become dirty? Are there areas you may be neglecting

that need some special attention? Because the Sabbath day is the Lord's day, I know He would be pleased to have us each consider how we might better keep ourselves and our homes "unspotted from the world." After all, we have been taught that "only the home can compare with the temple in sacredness."⁴

"In January of 1982, [Elder Robert D. Hales] spoke in a devotional on the BYU campus in Provo, Utah. [He] invited the students to imagine that the Church was on one side of the podium . . . and the world was just

a foot or two away on the other side. This represented the 'very short distance between where the world was and where the Church standards were' when [he] was in college. Then, standing before the students 30 years later, [he] held up [his] hands in the same manner and explained, 'The world has gone far afield; [it has traveled; it is nowhere to be seen;] it has proceeded way, way out, all the way out of this [building and around the world].'⁵

This sobering reminder from Elder Hales is surely applicable to how

the world observes the Sabbath day today. It is vastly different than how the Lord intended it to be. One way to know whether or not what we do to observe and keep the Sabbath day is pleasing to the Lord is to ask ourselves the question, "Does the way I observe the Sabbath day more resemble the world's way of keeping it or the way the Lord intended it to be kept?"

It is interesting to note that one of the charges frequently brought against our Saviour was that of Sabbath breaking, but this was because he

How can we appropriately honour the Lord on His day? What gifts or sacrifices might we offer to appropriately remember Him?



failed to conform to the traditions and man-made regulations concerning the Sabbath. Satan doesn't really care whether we break the Sabbath by over-regulating it the way the Pharisees did—with unending rules and regulations—or whether we throw out all the rules and use it as a lazy day to do nothing or simply make it just another day of the week. He loves to deal in the extremes. We will know in our hearts if we are keeping the Sabbath day holy and remembering to honour the Lord if what we are doing are things He would do if He were here—especially and most importantly in our homes.

In Matthew 12:12 we read the Saviour's own words: "Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days." And one of the Lord's chosen prophets in our dispensation, President Spencer W. Kimball, taught that "the Sabbath is a holy day in which to do worthy and holy things. Abstinence from work and recreation is important, but insufficient. The Sabbath calls for constructive thoughts and acts."⁶ I think President Kimball was inviting us to be more intentional or thoughtful about what we do or don't do on the Sabbath. One way to do that is to consider or change the way we *prepare* for the Sabbath both spiritually and temporally. We know this pleases the Lord

because He said, "And on this day . . . let thy food be prepared with singleness of heart that thy fasting may be perfect, or, in other words, that thy joy may be full" (D&C 59:13).

My dear friend and counsellor in the Relief Society general presidency Sister Linda S. Reeves recently shared how and why she lives this counsel. As a mother of 13 children, she recalled that when her children were all living at home, she found it was absolutely necessary to prepare for the Sabbath day well in advance in order to make it a holy day. She then admitted that she had slipped out of that habit for a time, since only she and her husband were then at home. She said that recently she recommitted to preparing more diligently for the Sabbath on Saturday, especially in her meal preparation. She said something like, "I saw it as sort of a sign or a love letter to my Heavenly Father that I would more intentionally remember Him on His special day." Then she testified that in her efforts to remember Him by preparing ahead to worship Him and have temporal things in order, in return He has blessed her with a special reassurance of His love. She said, "It is as if He is sending me a love letter in return."

In a talk he gave a few years ago, President Henry B. Eyring said, "[You] cannot give a crust to the Lord without receiving a loaf in return."⁷ I think

that is what Sister Reeves was feeling when she shared her experience of her Sabbath day observance and preparation.

The prophet Isaiah offers beautiful promises given to him by the Lord Himself, applicable to those who choose to honour His holy day. We find those promises in Isaiah 58:13–14.

"If thou turn away . . . from doing *thy* pleasure on *my* holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour *him*, not doing *thine* own ways, nor *thine* own pleasure, nor speaking *thine* own words:

"Then shalt thou *delight thyself in the Lord*; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" (emphasis added).

"Delighting" in the Lord's day requires some sacrifice on our part. How can we appropriately honour the Lord on *His* day? What gifts or sacrifices might we offer to appropriately *remember Him*? Because what you do or do not do on His day is a personal sign between you and the Lord, the Holy Ghost will reveal to you, if He has not done so already, what would best please the Lord and help you to delight in doing so.

I invite each of us to ponder carefully what the Spirit is willing



to teach us about keeping the Sabbath day holy. I add my personal witness that “you cannot give a crust to the Lord without receiving a loaf in return,” especially if that crust is given with all your heart, might, mind and strength as a sign of your love for Him. That we may each leave this meeting today resolved to better receive and use the Sabbath day as a *gift*—particularly in our homes—is my prayer. I testify our loving Heavenly Father gives not only “good gifts”

but the “best gifts,” including the Sabbath day. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, “The Sabbath Is a Delight,” *Ensign*, May 2015, 129.
2. James E. Faust, “The Lord’s Day,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 35.
3. Julie Thompson, “Unspotted from the World,” *Ensign*, July 2012, 80; emphasis added.
4. Bible Dictionary, “Temple.”
5. Robert D. Hales, “Stand Strong in Holy Places,” *Ensign*, May 2013, 49.
6. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (2006), 170.
7. Henry B. Eyring, “Opportunities to Do Good,” *Ensign*, May 2011, 25, quoting Melvin J. Ballard.

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