

prepared to partake of the sacrament, renew my covenants, and feel of the cleansing power of the Atonement.”

6- Why does the Savior put so much importance upon the sacrament, dear sisters? What importance does this weekly renewal of our baptismal covenants play in our lives? Do we recognize the ability of the Savior to completely cleanse us every week as we worthily and thoughtfully partake of the sacrament? President Boyd K. Packer has testified, “That is the promise of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Atonement: ... that at the end of [our lives, we] can go through the veil having repented of [our] sins and having been washed clean through the blood of Christ.”¹

7- Our presidency feels great joy as our sisters and their families make and keep covenants, but our hearts ache for those of you who are experiencing great adversity in your lives because of the covenant-breaking of loved ones. The prophet Jacob, brother to Nephi, was charged by the Lord to speak to his brethren concerning the righteous women and children of his day. I testify that his words have been preserved specifically for our day. He speaks to us as if the Savior Himself were speaking. Jacob was “weighed down with much ... anxiety” as he testified to husbands and fathers:

8- “It grieveth me that I must use so much boldness of speech ... before your wives and your children, many of whose feelings are exceedingly tender and chaste and delicate. ...

9- “... The sobbings of their hearts ascend up to God. ... Many hearts [have] died, pierced with deep wounds.”²

10- To the covenant-keeping women and children of his and our day, Jacob promises:

11- “Look unto God with firmness of mind, and pray unto him with exceeding faith, and he will console you in your afflictions. ...

12- “... Lift up your heads and receive the pleasing word of God, and feast upon his love.”³

13- Sisters, I testify of the strength and power of prayer as we express our deepest pains and desires to our Heavenly Father and of the answers that are received as we “feast upon” the scriptures and the words of the living prophets.

14- Almost three years ago a devastating fire gutted the interior of the beloved, historic tabernacle in Provo, Utah. Its loss was deemed a great tragedy by both the community and Church members. Many wondered, “Why did the Lord let this happen? Surely He could have prevented the fire or stopped its destruction.”

15- Ten months later, during the October 2011 general conference, there was an audible gasp when President Thomas S. Monson announced that the nearly destroyed tabernacle was to become a holy temple—a house of the Lord! Suddenly we could see what the Lord had always known! He didn't cause the fire, but He allowed the fire to strip away the interior. He saw the tabernacle as a magnificent temple—a permanent home for making sacred, eternal covenants.⁴

16- My dear sisters, the Lord allows us to be tried and tested, sometimes to our maximum capacity. We have seen the lives of loved ones—and maybe our own—figuratively burned to the ground and have wondered why a loving and caring Heavenly Father would allow such things to happen. But He does not leave us in the ashes; He stands with open arms, eagerly inviting us to come to Him. He is building our lives into magnificent temples where His Spirit can dwell eternally.

17- In Doctrine and Covenants 58:3–4, the Lord tells us:

18- “Ye cannot behold with your natural eyes, for the present time, the design of your God concerning those things which shall come hereafter, and the glory which shall follow after much tribulation.

19- “For after much tribulation come the blessings. Wherefore the day cometh that ye shall be crowned with much glory.”

20- Sisters, I testify that the Lord has a plan for each of our lives. Nothing that happens is a shock or a surprise to Him. He is all-knowing and all-loving. He is eager to help us, to comfort us, and to ease our pain as we rely on the power of the Atonement and honor our covenants. The trials and tribulation that we experience may be the very things that guide us to come unto Him and cling to our covenants so that we might return to His presence and receive all that the Father hath.

21- This past year I have needed and wanted to feel the love of the Lord more deeply, to receive personal revelation, to better understand my temple covenants, and to have my burdens lightened. As I have prayed specifically for these blessings, I have felt the Spirit directing me to go to the temple and listen more closely to each word of the blessings pronounced upon me. I testify that as I have listened more intently and tried to exercise my faith, the Lord has been merciful to me and has helped make my burdens light. He has helped me to feel great peace about prayers that have not yet been answered. We bind the Lord to keep His promises when we keep our covenants and exercise our faith.⁵ Come to the temple, dear sisters, and claim your blessings!

22- I want to touch upon another way that can instill us with confidence and faith. We sometimes, as women, have a tendency to be very critical

of ourselves. During these times we need to seek the Spirit and ask, "Is this what the Lord wants me to think about myself, or is Satan trying to beat me down?" Remember the nature of our Heavenly Father, whose love is perfect and infinite.⁶ He wants to build us up, not tear us down.

23- As members of the Church, we may sometimes feel that we need to be part of a "perfect LDS family" in order to be accepted by the Lord. We often feel "less-than" or like misfits in the kingdom if we feel we do not fit that picture. Dear sisters, when all is said and done, what will matter to our Father in Heaven will be how well we have kept our covenants and how much we have tried to follow the example of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

24- I testify that Jesus Christ is our Savior and Redeemer. Because of His atoning sacrifice, we can be washed clean weekly as we worthily partake of His sacrament. As we renew and honor our covenants, our burdens can be lightened and we can continually become purified and strengthened so that at the end of our lives we will be counted worthy to receive exaltation and eternal life. I testify of these things in the name of our beloved Savior, Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Boyd K. Packer, "The Atonement," *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2012, 77.
2. Jacob 2:3, 7, 35.
3. Jacob 3:1–2.
4. See Mosiah 23:21–22.
5. See Doctrine and Covenants 82:10.
6. See Russell M. Nelson, "Divine Love," *Ensign*, Feb. 2003, 20–25; *Liahona*, Feb. 2003, 12–17.

Claim the Blessings of Your Covenants

By Sister Linda S. Reeves
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1- Sisters, how wonderful it is to be with you again.

2- I recently met a woman who was preparing to be baptized. This particular Sunday she arrived at church having walked two miles (3 km) in heavy mud. She immediately went into the restroom, removed her muddy clothes, washed, and put on clean Sunday clothes. In the Relief Society meeting she told of her conversion. I was touched by her overwhelming desire to be washed clean and pure through repentance and the atoning sacrifice of the Savior and her willingness to give up her "old life" in order to make sacred covenants with our Father in Heaven. She had separated from her boyfriend, was overcoming addictions in order to live the Word of Wisdom, quit her Sunday job, and lost the friendship of loved ones when she announced her plans to be baptized. She was so anxious to give away all of her sins that she might be washed clean and feel the redeeming love of the Savior. I was inspired that morning by her desire to become both physically and spiritually clean.

3- We know that many of you have made similar sacrifices as you have felt the witness of the Holy Ghost and have longed to repent, be baptized, and be made clean. Perhaps at no other time do we feel the divine love of the Savior as abundantly as we do when we repent and feel His loving arms outstretched to embrace us and assure us of His love and acceptance.

4- A few Sundays ago as I listened to the sacrament prayer, I was moved by the way that the priest pronounced each word with great feeling. Later I called that priest to thank him for helping make the sacrament a deep spiritual experience for me and the congregation. He was not at home, but his mother responded, "Oh, he will be so happy that you called! This was his first time giving the sacrament prayer, and we have been preparing together, talking about the importance of the sacrament and worthily renewing our baptismal covenants with the Savior." How I love this dear mother for teaching her son about the power of baptismal covenants and how he can help the members of the ward feel that power.

5- Another mother I know of has sat alone at church for a number of years with her four young children. Seldom able to concentrate on the Savior during the sacrament, she formed a plan. Now she tries to spend time each Saturday reviewing her week and thinking about her covenants and what she needs to repent of. "Then," she says, "no matter what kind of an experience I have with my children on Sunday, I am