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Progression Talk- 5/19/24

I want to talk to you today about Progression, which is one of my favorite gospel topics, and I think one of the most inspiring.

In an effort to make learning and spiritual growth a part of our everyday life, Sarah and I have been reading President Nelson's book "Heart of the Matter". And one of the most inspiring things he discusses, and early on, is the progression he has seen in humanity over the 100 years he has lived. We know President Nelson was a very successful heart surgeon, but in his book he says that when he was younger, and in school, heart surgery wasn't even a field that existed. There was a long held belief that if you touched the heart it would stop beating. And from this place, President Nelson would go on to help to open and pioneer this field, becoming the 3rd doctor in the United States to perform an open heart surgery, and the first west of the Mississippi. So it's an incredibly inspiring thing to reflect on this one aspect of medicine, and how far things have come in his lifetime. President Nelson also mentions living through the end of World War 2, seeing the Berlin Wall come down, the civil rights movement and progress toward racial equality, and the fall of Apartheid and Nelson Mandela becoming South Africa's first Black President. He says that humanity has great potential as children of God, and even in the midst of adversity and conflict humanity has the capacity for growth, understanding, compassion and progression.

From the foundations of this earth, Heavenly Fathers plan was centered in the purpose of helping his Spirit children to grow and progress, and to become more like him. By coming to earth, we would receive a mortal body, and enter into different types of experience by which we could grow, and learn. God's plan to help souls to grow and progress in this way, is also known as The plan of happiness. So there is some definite connection between happiness and our progression, as outlined by God from the beginning. It feels good to grow and to learn, to make steps toward our eternal potential. One of these ways that growth brings joy, is in growing to know and love God, and his son Jesus Christ, growing in our capacities to love and serve others, (our families and friends and communities), growing in knowledge of various kinds, and in our talents and abilities. God wants us to try things, to find things we enjoy, and that benefit ourselves and others. He wants us to stretch ourselves, and to pursue things that take effort, and persistence. And after much effort and practice over time, getting better little by little, we learn the principle from Doctrine and Covenants 64:33 that from small things proceedeth that which is great.

We all have divine potential, and in this life have the opportunity to make choices that will affect our eternal outcome and eternal destiny. If our mortal journey and effort to progress, and grow closer and return to God were likened to climbing a mountain, and attempting to reach the summit, in this journey we would each encounter two insurmountable obstacles..that in and of ourselves we have no ability to overcome. These two obstacles are sin, and mortal death. Without the atonement of Jesus Christ and his resurrection, all personal progress, all human love and relationships, the most beautiful aspects of our existence would not continue after physical death, and our souls would not be able to be reconciled with God. Through living a perfect life, and offering his life as a sacrifice to satisfy Old Testament law, and the justice it required upon every imperfect soul, Jesus Christ makes the plan of happiness possible. For each to have the

potential to grow eternally beyond our mortal lifetime- for love in human relationships to have potential to continue without end, and... -through repentance and entering into a covenant relationship with Jesus Christ- for each soul to have the opportunity to reconcile themselves to God and to return to his presence. And to do this with a more full experience and joy. Jesus is not the only thing we can have joy in, but it is only through Him that the existence of eternal joy and happiness is even possible.

I will now share two short personal experiences about progression, and conclude. First is that I have an almost 17 year old daughter. Two weeks ago when cute little Ada, came and sat in my lap and put stickers on her coloring book, it was the first time I'd held a child that age since my daughter was that old. And I then reflected on my time with her through life, and in recent high school years- helping as she went through algebra, geometry and algebra 2, seeing her work hard at something that's difficult for her.. but to persevere and grow, and sometimes do really well on tests and get good grades. And then I thought about other progress in her life, how far she has come, and how she's grown into a person that I really admire and am so proud of. And I realized that many of the greatest joys in my life were not just in my growth, but in seeing the progression of someone I love or care about. And that made me think of a scripture that denotes Heavenly Fathers joy and purpose as God in assisting and enabling our progression. "For this is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."

Something important to remember is that Progress isn't always a steady climb. Sometimes we have setbacks, challenges, and adversity. And often-times we lose ground before we can grow to new places. And in those times we can lean on family and friends and draw strength from our relationship with God. I've gotten so much strength over the years from connections to family such as my mom, and sister, and good friends, teachers, co-workers, and members and leaders of the church.

My final example is with my wife. Sarah has been a strong example to me that we can always be learning and growing. She's often reading inspiring books and sharing with me the things she's learned, which helps me also. She writes her goals down and encourages me to set and work toward goals too. And Sarah's kindness and thoughtfulness, desire to be close to God, to extend love to others, and to always do the right thing, has shown me the effect on the life of someone who lives really striving to follow gospel principles. This has strengthened my testimony that many of the most important tools and structure we have toward growing spiritually are gospel principles, within the structure of the restored church. Sarah also has two amazing children, that I'm grateful to know, and am growing being a part of their life.

I learn so much from all of you in your talks and testimonies, and have grown so much already from this year I've been part time attending this ward. We have a wonderful ward, such a loving, inspiring Bishop and his counselors, Brother Hardman and Keister, and incredible kind, and loving members.

In making the most of this gift of mortality, I urge all of us to try something new, carve out daily time for a goal you want to work toward, or a dream you've set aside, and to make time for the fundamentals that help us to grow spiritually- prayer and scripture study, service to others, and church and temple attendance. I urge you to Invest in yourself! And I testify that these small

efforts will compound into something great, and are the path to realizing our potential in this life and in the world to come! I leave this message with you in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.