Praying with real intent

Please take a moment with me to think about someone that has influenced your life for good. Someone that loves you and wants only the choicest blessings for you. A parent, a teacher, a grandparent, friend, could be anyone really.

Pause for 10-15 seconds.

How pleased that person must be to know that you are here today, where you should be. Partaking of the sacrament. Singing songs of praise. Teaching and learning from one another. Serving and loving one another. What a blessing it is to be a small part of His work on this earth.

Later in my remarks I’ll share a story with you about the people I thought of.

Our family is blessed to have our oldest daughter Mellissa serving a full time mission in Tacoma Washington. I really look forward to Monday mornings now. Her emails make my spirit smile, they are just wonderful.

I learned this past Monday that she and I are both speaking about prayer today. I asked her to share some experiences with prayer from her mission. She bore testimony of the power of prayer to soften hearts, and said that whenever they encounter someone that is less than excited to see them they ask if they can pray together and that without fail the person is more pleasant when they leave. Her experience has been that even the grumpiest people end up smiling and wishing them well if they will just accept the invitation to pray with the missionaries.

Enos records a powerful experience with prayer, and how vital it is in relation to the Atonement:

1 Behold, it came to pass that I, Enos, knowing my father that he was a just man—for he taught me in his language, and also in the nurture and admonition of the Lord—and blessed be the name of my God for it—

2 And I will tell you of the wrestle which I had before God, before I received a remission of my sins.

3 Behold, I went to hunt beasts in the forests; and the words which I had often heard my father speak concerning eternal life, and the joy of the saints, sunk deep into my heart.

4 And my soul hungered; and I kneeled down before my Maker, and I cried unto him in mighty prayer and supplication for mine own soul; and all the day long did I cry unto him; yea, and when the night came I did still raise my voice high that it reached the heavens.

Two of our most universal needs that we all have in common are, first, the need to personally change, to examine ourselves, and to repent; and, second, the responsibility and concern we have for others. We see this pattern in Enos as later we see that after he received a remission of his sins he began to desire for the welfare of his brethren the Nephites and then his brethren the Laminates. The words he uses are that he poured out his whole soul unto God for them.

Then in verse 12 we read:

12 And it came to pass that after I had prayed and labored with all diligence, the Lord said unto me: I will grant unto thee according to thy desires, because of thy faith.

Enos spent the rest of his days preaching and declaring the word of God to the people. (Laboring with all dilligence) Rejoicing in that work above anything else.

Brothers and sisters, what do you hunger for? What do you need? Family responsibilities, church callings and life in general can bless and challenge us. Often for me it is during these challenging moments that I, like Enos remember the words and example of my own father and mother, and ask myself “what would they do?” Remember the exercise we did just a few minutes ago? Well, the people I thought about then and think about often are my parents. I’d like to share with you an experience I had with my father that has impacted my life.

My father has been a Utah State Aggie fan since long before I was born, and many of my best childhood memories include Aggie football and basketball games with my dad and my two brothers. My other memories with my dad all involve a shovel and dirt, so maybe the games are my fondest memories just because they didn’t involve work.

In 2014 I had the opportunity to take my father on a trip to Tennessee to watch the Aggies play the Volunteers in the season opener. I’ve gone on a few trips with my dad and my two brothers, but this was the first time it would be just me and my dad, and I wanted it to be perfect. This would finally be the year that the Aggies would pull through and win one of these big games, and I could just picture celebrating with my dad. Wearing our Aggie blue, we took our seats with 105,000 friendly Tennessee fans and cheered the Aggies on to a 38-7 loss, and it didn’t feel even that close. The weather even changed from sunny to dark rain clouds, of course.

By now you must be wondering why I decided to share this story with you. Not very uplifting right? Well, let me tell you the rest of the story. This trip will forever be one of my favorite memories with my dad. Not because it was a great game, it wasn’t. Not because the food was good and the people were nice, true and true, but because of two experiences we had after the game.

First I have to go back to before the game. We stayed in a hotel several miles from the stadium and learned that hundreds of school buses would be used to shuttle fans to the stadium and that would be much easier than trying to drive our rental car and find a place to park. So we took the bus and noted that it dropped us off at about center field of the baseball stadium.

The game ended and we left the stadium. We were talking to the friendly people and just kept walking along with the herd. After walking for about thirty minutes we realized we had not exited the stadium from the same side we entered and it was starting to get dark. We started asking people for directions to the baseball stadium, and realized we were not close. We walked as quickly as we could for another thirty minutes before arriving at the baseball stadium and seeing that our bus, and all the other busses were gone. My heart sank. I wanted this trip to be perfect, and instead, our team lost, we got rained on and now we were stranded and alone. I couldn’t believe how quiet and empty the streets had suddenly become. I was feeling a little discouraged. I had been saying a silent prayer in my heart as we walked toward our bus stop, and still the bus was gone. I started searching on my phone for taxi service and learned that it would be a couple of hours before a taxi could get to where we were. You see, all the roads leading to the stadium become one way streets toward the stadium before the game and one way streets away from the stadium after the games to accommodate traffic. We would have to sit and wait for the traffic to clear, but the taxi assured me he would come and get us as soon as he could. As I hung up the phone we saw a couple walking toward us. They explained that they were season ticket holders and had also missed the bus.This immediately made me feel a little better. We offered to share our taxi and then we spent the next hour getting to know the Bowdens. I started to feel like my dads missionary companion as they started asking about the church, and we offered answers. We eventually shared a taxi back to our hotels, and my dad still jokes a little that with another half hour we could have had a baptismal commitment. Three years have since passed and I still get text messages from Kent Bowden asking me how my dad is doing. What a wonderful experience that turned out to be. My silent prayer for things to work out seemed to go unanswered when the bus wasn’t there. But maybe meeting the Bowdens was an answer to my prayer. Things DID work out, granted, a little later than planned, but we ended up making some new friends and having a missionary experience.

Then, that night as we got ready for bed we knelt for prayer and my dad told me that he and my mom kneel and pray every night for me and my family. They pray for our happiness and success. The spirit testified to me that night that my family has been blessed because of the prayers of my parents. I can imagine them pouring out their whole souls on our behalf. I’ve long suspected that my parents pray for my family, but hearing him say that out loud was powerful. I learned a valuable lesson that night. This WAS a perfect day/trip with my dad and it had nothing to do with a football game. It’s never been about the game(s), that was just the backdrop to the experience of talking to and learning from my father. I could use the first verse of Enos to describe this day with my dad.

1 Behold, it came to pass that I, Enos(Randy), knowing my father that he was a just man—for he taught me in his language, and also in the nurture and admonition of the Lord—and blessed be the name of my God for it—

What a blessing it has been to me to have been taught by my parents both in word and by their examples to love the Lord and turn to Him at all times.

So you may be thinking that because of my good parents (and others) that I’ve been faithful in prayer my entire life. But President Monson was speaking straight to me when he said:

“Unfortunately, prosperity, abundance, honor, and praise lead some men to the false security of haughty self-assurance and the abandonment of the inclination to pray. Conversely, turmoil, tribulation, sickness, and death crumble the castles of men’s pride and bring them to their knees to plead for power from on High.” President Monson

So when I say that I’m grateful for the opportunity to speak to you today, what I’m really saying is that I’m grateful for the gentle push that is sometimes needed to get me back on track. That is truly a blessing.

Going back to the exercise at the beginning of my talk. Think now about your Heavenly Father and how much He loves you and wants to bless you with all that He has. Think about how pleased He is that you are here and that you are striving to keep his commandments.