

THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

182nd Annual General Conference

March 31—April 1, 2012

Published by
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Salt Lake City, Utah

© 2012 Intellectual Reserve, Inc.
All rights reserved

English approval: 12/11
Translation approval: 12/11
Translation of *182nd Annual General Conference*
English
PD50038655 000

Contents

SATURDAY MORNING SESSION

As We Gather Once Again | *Thomas S. Monson* 1

And a Little Child Shall Lead Them | *Boyd K. Packer* 4

Teaching Our Children to Understand | *Cheryl A. Esplin* 11

Converted to His Gospel through His Church | *Donald L. Hallstrom* . 16

He Truly Loves Us | *Paul E. Koelliker* 21

Sacrifice | *Dallin H. Oaks* 26

Mountains to Climb | *Henry B. Eyring* 33

SATURDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

The Sustaining of Church Officers | *Dieter F. Uchtdorf* 40

Church Auditing Department Report, 2011 | *Robert W. Cantwell* 44

Statistical Report, 2011 | *Brook P. Hales* 46

The Laborers in the Vineyard | *Jeffrey R. Holland* 48

Coming to Ourselves: The Sacrament, the Temple, and Sacrifice in
Service | *Robert D. Hales* 53

Faith, Fortitude, Fulfillment: A Message to Single Parents | *David S.
Baxter* 58

Abide in the Lord’s Territory! | *Ulisses Soares* 62

In Tune with the Music of Faith | *Quentin L. Cook* 66

How to Obtain Revelation and Inspiration for Your Personal
Life | *Richard G. Scott* 73

PRIESTHOOD SESSION

The Powers of Heaven | *David A. Bednar* 79

The Rescue for Real Growth | *Richard C. Edgley* 86

Aaronic Priesthood: Arise and Use the Power of God <i>Adrián Ochoa</i>	91
The Why of Priesthood Service <i>Dieter F. Uchtdorf</i>	96
Families under Covenant <i>Henry B. Eyring</i>	103
Willing and Worthy to Serve <i>Thomas S. Monson</i>	110

SUNDAY MORNING SESSION

The Merciful Obtain Mercy <i>Dieter F. Uchtdorf</i>	117
Thanks Be to God <i>Russell M. Nelson</i>	123
Special Lessons <i>Ronald A. Rasband</i>	129
The Vision of Prophets regarding Relief Society: Faith, Family, Relief <i>Julie B. Beck</i>	134
The Doctrine of Christ <i>D. Todd Christofferson</i>	140
The Race of Life <i>Thomas S. Monson</i>	148

SUNDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

The Power of Deliverance <i>L. Tom Perry</i>	155
That the Lost May Be Found <i>M. Russell Ballard</i>	161
Having the Vision to Do <i>O. Vincent Haleck</i>	167
Only upon the Principles of Righteousness <i>Larry Y. Wilson</i>	172
Was It Worth It? <i>David F. Evans</i>	177
To Hold Sacred <i>Paul B. Pieper</i>	183
What Thinks Christ of Me? <i>Neil L. Andersen</i>	188
As We Close This Conference <i>Thomas S. Monson</i>	194

GENERAL YOUNG WOMEN MEETING

Arise and Shine Forth <i>Ann M. Dibb</i>	197
Seek Learning: You Have a Work to Do <i>Mary N. Cook</i>	202
Now Is the Time to Arise and Shine! <i>Elaine S. Dalton</i>	208
Believe, Obey, and Endure <i>Thomas S. Monson</i>	214

As We Gather Once Again

By President Thomas S. Monson

Our Heavenly Father is mindful of each of us and our needs. May we be filled with His Spirit as we partake of the proceedings of this conference.

My beloved brothers and sisters, as we gather once again in a general conference of the Church, I welcome you and express my love to you. We meet each six months to strengthen one another, to extend encouragement, to provide comfort, to build faith. We are here to learn. Some of you may be seeking answers to questions and challenges you are experiencing in your life. Some are struggling with disappointments or losses. Each can be enlightened and uplifted and comforted as the Spirit of the Lord is felt.

Should there be changes which need to be made in your life, may you find the incentive and the courage to do so as you listen to the inspired words which will be spoken. May each of us resolve anew to live so that we are worthy sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father. May we continue to oppose evil wherever it is found.

How blessed we are to have come to earth at such a time as this—a marvelous time in the long history of the world. We can't all be together under one roof, but we now have the ability to partake of the proceedings of this conference through the wonders of television, radio, cable, satellite transmission, and the Internet—even on mobile devices. We come together as one, speaking many languages, living in many lands, but all of one faith and one doctrine and one purpose.

From a small beginning 182 years ago, our presence is now felt throughout the world. This great cause in which we are engaged will continue to go forth, changing and blessing lives as it does so. No cause, no force in the entire world can stop the work of God. Despite what comes, this great cause will go forward. You recall the prophetic words of the Prophet Joseph Smith: "No unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing; persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done."¹

There is much that is difficult and challenging in the world today, my brothers and sisters, but there is also much that is good and uplifting. As we declare in our thirteenth article of faith, "If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things." May we ever continue to do so.

I thank you for your faith and devotion to the gospel. I thank you for the love and care you show one to another. I thank you for the service you provide in your wards and branches and in your stakes and districts. It is such service that enables the Lord to accomplish many of His purposes here upon the earth.

I express my thanks to you for your kindnesses to me wherever I go. I thank you for your prayers in my behalf. I have felt those prayers and am most grateful for them.

Now, my brothers and sisters, we have come to be instructed and inspired. Many messages will be shared during the next two days. I can assure you that those men and women who will address you have sought heaven's help and direction as they have prepared their messages. They have been inspired concerning that which they will share with us.

Our Heavenly Father is mindful of each of us and our needs. May we be filled with His Spirit as we partake of the proceedings of this conference. This is my sincere prayer in the sacred name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen.

Note

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 444.

And a Little Child Shall Lead Them

By President Boyd K. Packer

President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Husbands and wives should understand that their first calling—from which they will never be released—is to one another and then to their children.

Years ago on a cold night in a train station in Japan, I heard a tap on the window of my sleeper car. There stood a freezing boy wearing a ragged shirt with a dirty rag tied about a swollen jaw. His head was covered with scabies. He held a rusty tin can and a spoon, the symbol of an orphan beggar. As I struggled to open the door to give him money, the train pulled out.

I will never forget that starving little boy left standing in the cold, holding up an empty tin can. Nor can I forget how helpless I felt as the train slowly pulled away and left him standing on the platform.

Some years later in Cusco, a city high in the Andes of Peru, Elder A. Theodore Tuttle and I held a sacrament meeting in a long, narrow room that opened onto the street. It was night, and while Elder Tuttle spoke, a little boy, perhaps six years old, appeared in the doorway. He wore only a ragged shirt that went about to his knees.

On our left was a small table with a plate of bread for the sacrament. This starving street orphan saw the bread and inched slowly along the wall toward it. He was almost to the table when a woman on the aisle saw him. With a stern toss of her head, she banished him out into the night. I groaned within myself.

Later the little boy returned. He slid along the wall, glancing from the bread to me. When he was near the point where the

woman would see him again, I held out my arms, and he came running to me. I held him on my lap.

Then, as something symbolic, I set him on Elder Tuttle's chair. After the closing prayer the hungry little boy darted out into the night.

When I returned home, I told President Spencer W. Kimball about my experience. He was deeply moved and told me, "You were holding a nation on your lap." He said to me more than once, "That experience has far greater meaning than you have yet come to know."

As I have visited Latin American countries nearly 100 times, I have looked for that little boy in the faces of the people. Now I do know what President Kimball meant.

I met another shivering boy on the streets of Salt Lake City. It was late on another cold winter night. We were leaving a Christmas dinner at a hotel. Down the street came six or eight noisy boys. All of them should have been at home out of the cold.

One boy had no coat. He bounced about very rapidly to stave off the chill. He disappeared down a side street, no doubt to a small, shabby apartment and a bed that did not have enough covers to keep him warm.

At night, when I pull the covers over me, I offer a prayer for those who have no warm bed to go to.

I was stationed in Osaka, Japan, when World War II closed. The city was rubble, and the streets were littered with blocks, debris, and bomb craters. Although most of the trees had been blasted away, some few of them still stood with shattered limbs and trunks and had the courage to send forth a few twigs with leaves.

A tiny girl dressed in a ragged, colored kimono was busily gathering yellow sycamore leaves into a bouquet. The little child seemed unaware of the devastation that surrounded her as she scrambled over the rubble to add new leaves to her collection. She had found the one beauty left in her world. Perhaps I should say *she* was the beautiful part of her world. Somehow, to think of her increases my faith. Embodied in the child was hope.

Mormon taught that "little children are alive in Christ"¹ and need not repent.

Around the turn of the previous century, two missionaries were laboring in the mountains of the southern United States. One day, from a hilltop, they saw people gathering in a clearing far below. The missionaries did not often have many people to whom they might preach, so they made their way down to the clearing.

A little boy had drowned, and there was to be a funeral. His parents had sent for the minister to “say words” over their son. The missionaries stood back as the itinerant minister faced the grieving father and mother and began his sermon. If the parents expected to receive comfort from this man of the cloth, they would be disappointed.

He scolded them severely for not having had the little boy baptized. They had put it off because of one thing or another, and now it was too late. He told them very bluntly that their little boy had gone to hell. It was their fault. They were to blame for his endless torment.

After the sermon was over and the grave was covered, the elders approached the grieving parents. “We are servants of the Lord,” they told the mother, “and we have come with a message for you.” As the sobbing parents listened, the two elders read from the revelations and bore their testimony of the restoration of the keys for the redemption of both the living and the dead.

I have some sympathy for that preacher. He was doing the best he could with such light and knowledge as he had. But there is more that he should have been able to offer. There is the fulness of the gospel.

The elders came as comforters, as teachers, as servants of the Lord, as authorized ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

These children of whom I spoke represent all of our Heavenly Father’s children. “Children are an heritage of the Lord: and . . . happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them.”²

The creation of life is a great responsibility for a married couple. It is the challenge of mortality to be a worthy and responsible parent. Neither man nor woman can bear children alone. It was meant that children have two parents—both a father and a mother. No other pattern or process can replace this one.

Long ago a woman tearfully told me that as a college student she had made a serious mistake with her boyfriend. He had arranged for an abortion. In due time they graduated and were married and had several other children. She told me how tormented she now was to look at her family, her beautiful children, and see in her mind the place, empty now, where that one child was missing.

If this couple understands and applies the Atonement, they will know that those experiences and the pain connected with them can be erased. No pain will last forever. It is not easy, but life was never meant to be either easy or fair. Repentance and the lasting hope that forgiveness brings will always be worth the effort.

Another young couple tearfully told me they had just come from a doctor where they were told they would be unable to have children of their own. They were brokenhearted with the news. They were surprised when I told them that they were actually quite fortunate. They wondered why I would say such a thing. I told them their state was infinitely better than that of other couples who were capable of being parents but who rejected and selfishly avoided that responsibility.

I told them, "At least you want children, and that desire will weigh heavily in your favor in your earthly lives and beyond because it will provide spiritual and emotional stability. Ultimately, you will be much better off because you wanted children and could not have them, as compared to those who could but would not have children."

Still others remain unmarried and therefore childless. Some, due to circumstances beyond their control, are raising children as single mothers or single fathers. These are temporary states. In the eternal scheme of things—not always in mortality—righteous yearning and longing will be fulfilled.

"If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."³

The ultimate end of all activity in the Church is to see a husband and his wife and their children happy at home, protected by the principles and laws of the gospel, sealed safely in the covenants of the everlasting priesthood. Husbands and

wives should understand that their first calling—from which they will never be released—is to one another and then to their children.

One of the great discoveries of parenthood is that we learn far more about what really matters from our children than we ever did from our parents. We come to recognize the truth in Isaiah's prophecy that "a little child shall lead them."⁴

In Jerusalem, "Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,

"And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

"Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."⁵

"Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

"And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence."⁶

We read in the Book of Mormon of the visit of Jesus Christ to the New World. He healed and blessed the people and commanded that the little children should be brought to Him.

Mormon records, "They brought their little children and set them down upon the ground round about him, and Jesus stood in the midst; and the multitude gave way till they had all been brought unto him."⁷

He then commanded the people to kneel. With the children around Him, the Savior knelt and offered a prayer to our Father in Heaven. After the prayer the Savior wept, "and he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them.

"And when he had done this he wept again."⁸

I can understand the feelings expressed by the Savior toward children. There is much to be learned from following His example in seeking to pray for, bless, and teach "those little ones."⁹

I was number 10 in a family of 11 children. So far as I know, neither my father nor my mother served in a prominent calling in the Church.

Our parents served faithfully in their most important calling—as parents. Our father led our home in righteousness,

never with anger or fear. And the powerful example of our father was magnified by the tender counsel of our mother. The gospel is a powerful influence in the life of every one of us in the Packer family and to the next generation and the next generation and the next, as far as we have seen.

I hope to be judged as good a man as my father. Before I hear those words “well done” from my Heavenly Father, I hope to first hear them from my mortal father.

Many times I have puzzled over why I should be called as an Apostle and then as the President of the Quorum of the Twelve in spite of having come from a home where the father could be termed as less active. I am not the only member of the Twelve who fits that description.

Finally I could see and understand that it may have been because of that circumstance that I was called. And I could understand why in all that we do in the Church, we need to provide the way, as leaders, for parents and children to have time together as families. Priesthood leaders must be careful to make the Church family-friendly.

There are many things about living the gospel of Jesus Christ that cannot be measured by that which is counted or charted in records of attendance. We busy ourselves with buildings and budgets and programs and procedures. In so doing, it is possible to overlook the very spirit of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Too often someone comes to me and says, “President Packer, wouldn’t it be nice if . . . ?”

I usually stop them and say no, because I suspect that what follows will be a new activity or program that is going to add a burden of time and financial means on the family.

Family time is sacred time and should be protected and respected. We urge our members to show devotion to their families.

When we were first married, my wife and I decided that we would accept the children that would be born to us with the responsibility attending their birth and growth. In due time they have formed families of their own.

Twice in our marriage, at the time of the births of two of our little boys, we have had a doctor say, "I do not think you are going to keep this one."

Both times this brought the response from us that we would give our lives if our tiny son could keep his. In the course of that offer, it dawned on us that this same devotion is akin to what Heavenly Father feels about each of us. What a supernal thought.

Now in the sunset of our lives, Sister Packer and I understand and witness that our families can be forever. As we obey the commandments and live the gospel fully, we will be protected and blessed. With our children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren, our prayer is that each one of our growing family will have that same devotion toward those precious little ones.

Fathers and mothers, next time you cradle a newborn child in your arms, you can have an inner vision of the mysteries and purposes of life. You will better understand why the Church is as it is and why the family is the basic organization in time and in eternity. I bear witness that the gospel of Jesus Christ is true, that the plan of redemption, which has been called the plan of happiness, is a plan for families. I pray the Lord that the families of the Church will be blessed, parents and children, that this work will roll forth as the Father intends. I bear this witness in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Moroni 8:12.
2. Psalm 127:3, 5.
3. 1 Corinthians 15:19.
4. Isaiah 11:6.
5. Matthew 18:2–4.
6. Matthew 19:14–15.
7. 3 Nephi 17:12.
8. 3 Nephi 17:21–22.
9. 3 Nephi 17:24.

Teaching Our Children to Understand

By Cheryl A. Esplin

Second Counselor in the Primary General Presidency

Teaching our children to understand is more than just imparting information. It's helping our children get the doctrine into their hearts.

As years pass, many details in my life are becoming more and more dim, but some of the memories that remain most clear are the births of each of our children. Heaven seemed so near, and if I try, I can almost feel those same feelings of reverence and wonder I experienced each time one of those precious infants was placed in my arms.

Our “children are an heritage of the Lord” (Psalm 127:3). He knows and loves each one with perfect love (see Moroni 8:17). What a sacred responsibility Heavenly Father places upon us as parents to partner with Him in helping His choice spirits become what He knows they can become.

This divine privilege of raising our children is a much greater responsibility than we can do alone, without the Lord’s help. He knows exactly what our children need to know, what they need to do, and what they need to be to come back into His presence. He gives mothers and fathers specific instruction and guidance through the scriptures, His prophets, and the Holy Ghost.

In a latter-day revelation through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord instructs parents to teach their children to *understand* the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Notice the Lord doesn’t just say we are to “teach the doctrine”; His instructions are to teach our children to “*understand* the doctrine.” (See D&C 68:25, 28; emphasis added.)

In Psalms we read, “Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart” (Psalm 119:34).

Teaching our children to understand is more than just imparting information. It’s helping our children get the doctrine into their hearts in a way that it becomes part of their very being and is reflected in their attitudes and behavior throughout their lives.

Nephi taught that the role of the Holy Ghost is to carry the truth “unto the hearts of the children of men” (2 Nephi 33:1). Our role as parents is to do all we can to create an atmosphere where our children can feel the influence of the Spirit and then help them recognize what they are feeling.

I’m reminded of a phone call I received several years ago from our daughter, Michelle. With tender emotion she said, “Mom, I just had the most incredible experience with Ashley.” Ashley is her daughter who was five years old at the time. Michelle described the morning as being one of constant squabbling between Ashley and three-year-old Andrew—one wouldn’t share and the other would hit. After helping them work things out, Michelle went to check the baby.

Soon, Ashley came running in, angry that Andrew wasn’t sharing. Michelle reminded Ashley of the commitment they had made in home evening to be more kind to each other.

She asked Ashley if she wanted to pray and ask for Heavenly Father’s help, but Ashley, still very angry, responded, “No.” When asked if she believed Heavenly Father would answer her prayer, Ashley said she didn’t know. Her mother asked her to try and gently took her hands and knelt down with her.

Michelle suggested that Ashley could ask Heavenly Father to help Andrew share—and help her be kind. The thought of Heavenly Father helping her little brother share must have piqued Ashley’s interest, and she began to pray, first asking Heavenly Father to help Andrew share. As she asked Him to help her be kind, she began to cry. Ashley ended her prayer and buried her head on her mother’s shoulder. Michelle held her and asked why she was crying. Ashley said she didn’t know.

Her mother said, “I think I know why you’re crying. Do you feel good inside?” Ashley nodded, and her mother continued, “This is the Spirit helping you feel this way. It’s Heavenly Father’s way of telling you He loves you and will help you.”

She asked Ashley if she believed this, if she believed Heavenly Father could help her. With her little eyes full of tears, Ashley said she did.

Sometimes the most powerful way to teach our children to understand a doctrine is to teach in the context of what they are experiencing right at that moment. These moments are spontaneous and unplanned and happen in the normal flow of family life. They come and go quickly, so we need to be alert and recognize a teaching moment when our children come to us with a question or worry, when they have problems getting along with siblings or friends, when they need to control their anger, when they make a mistake, or when they need to make a decision. (See *Teaching, No Greater Call: A Resource Guide for Gospel Teaching* [1999], 140–41; *Marriage and Family Relations Instructor’s Manual* [2000], 61.)

If we are ready and will let the Spirit guide in these situations, our children will be taught with greater effect and understanding.

Just as important are the teaching moments that come as we thoughtfully plan regular occasions such as family prayer, family scripture study, family home evening, and other family activities.

In every teaching situation all learning and all understanding are best nurtured in an atmosphere of warmth and love where the Spirit is present.

About two months before his children turned eight years old, one father would set aside time each week to prepare them for baptism. His daughter said that when it was her turn, he gave her a journal and they sat together, just the two of them, and discussed and shared feelings about gospel principles. He had her draw a visual aid as they went along. It showed the premortal existence, this earth life, and each step she needed to take to return to live with Heavenly Father. He bore his testimony about each step of the plan of salvation as he taught it to her.

When his daughter recalled this experience after she was grown, she said: “I will never forget the love I felt from my dad as he spent that time with me. . . . I believe that this experience was a major reason I had a testimony of the gospel when I was baptized.” (See *Teaching, No Greater Call*, 129.)

Teaching for understanding takes determined and consistent effort. It requires teaching by precept and by example and especially by helping our children live what they learn.

President Harold B. Lee taught, “Without experiencing a gospel principle in action, it is . . . more difficult to believe in that principle” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee* [2000], 121).

I first learned to pray by kneeling with my family in family prayer. I was taught the language of prayer as I listened to my parents pray and as they helped me say my first prayers. I learned that I could talk to Heavenly Father and ask for guidance.

Every morning without fail, my mother and father gathered us around the kitchen table before breakfast, and we knelt in family prayer. We prayed at every meal. In the evening before bed, we knelt together in the living room and closed the day with family prayer.

Although there was much I didn’t understand about prayer as a child, it became such a part of my life that it stayed with me. I still continue to learn, and my understanding of the power of prayer still continues to grow.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said, “We all understand that the success of the gospel message depends upon its being taught and then understood and then lived in such a way that its promise of happiness and salvation can be realized” (“Teaching and Learning in the Church” [worldwide leadership training meeting, Feb. 10, 2007], *Liahona*, June 2007, 57; *Ensign*, June 2007, 89).

Learning to fully understand the doctrines of the gospel is a process of a lifetime and comes “line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little” (2 Nephi 28:30). As children learn and act upon what they learn, their understanding is expanded, which leads to more learning, more action, and an even greater and more enduring understanding.

We can know our children are beginning to understand the doctrine when we see it revealed in their attitudes and actions without external threats or rewards. As our children learn to understand gospel doctrines, they become more self-reliant and more responsible. They become part of the solution to our family challenges and make a positive contribution to the environment of our home and the success of our family.

We will teach our children to understand as we take advantage of every teaching situation, invite the Spirit, set the example, and help them live what they learn.

When we look into the eyes of a tiny infant, we are reminded of the song:

*I am a child of God,
And so my needs are great;
Help me to understand his words
Before it grows too late.*

*Lead me, guide me, walk beside me,
Help me find the way.
Teach me all that I must do
To live with him someday.*

("I Am a Child of God," *Hymns*, no. 301; emphasis added)

May we do so. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Converted to His Gospel through His Church

By Elder Donald L. Hallstrom

Of the Presidency of the Seventy

The purpose of the Church is to help us live the gospel.

I love the gospel of Jesus Christ *and* The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Sometimes we use the terms *gospel* and *Church* interchangeably, but they are not the same. They are, however, exquisitely interconnected, and we need both.

The gospel is the glorious plan of God in which we, as His children, are given the opportunity to receive all that the Father has (see D&C 84:38). This is called eternal life and is described as “the greatest of all the gifts of God” (D&C 14:7). A vital part of the plan is our earthly experience—a time to develop faith (see Moroni 7:26), to repent (see Mosiah 3:12), and to reconcile ourselves with God (see Jacob 4:11).

Because our mortal frailties and “opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11) would make this life profoundly difficult and because we could not cleanse our own sins, a Savior was needed. When Elohim, the Eternal God and Father of all our spirits, presented His plan of salvation, there was one among us who said, “Here am I, send me” (Abraham 3:27). His name was Jehovah.

Born of a Heavenly Father, both spiritually and physically, He possessed the omnipotence to overcome the world. Born of an earthly mother, He was subject to the pain and suffering of mortality. The great Jehovah was also named Jesus and additionally was given the title of Christ, meaning the Messiah or Anointed One. His crowning achievement was the Atonement, wherein Jesus the Christ “descended below all things” (D&C

88:6), making it possible for Him to pay a redeeming ransom for each of us.

The Church was established by Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry, “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 2:20). In this, “the dispensation of the fulness of times” (D&C 128:18), the Lord restored what once was, specifically telling the Prophet Joseph Smith, “I will establish a church by your hand” (D&C 31:7). Jesus Christ was and is the head of His Church, represented on earth by prophets holding apostolic authority.

This is a magnificent Church. Its organization, effectiveness, and sheer goodness are respected by all who sincerely seek to understand it. The Church has programs for children, youth, men, and women. It has beautiful meetinghouses that number more than 18,000. Majestic temples—now totaling 136—dot the earth, with another 30 under construction or announced. A full-time missionary force of over 56,000, comprised of the young and less so, are serving in 150 countries. The Church’s worldwide humanitarian work is a marvelous display of the generosity of our members. Our welfare system cares for our members and promotes self-reliance in a manner unduplicated anywhere. In this Church we have selfless lay leaders and a community of Saints who are willing to serve one another in a remarkable way. There is nothing like this Church in all the world.

When I was born, our family lived in a tiny cottage on the grounds of one of the great and historic meetinghouses of the Church, the Honolulu Tabernacle. I now apologize to my dear friends in the Presiding Bishopric, who oversee the facilities of the Church, but as a boy I climbed over and under and through every inch of that property, from the bottom of the water-filled reflecting pool to the top of the inside of the imposing lighted steeple. We even swung (Tarzan-like) on the long hanging vines of the huge banyan trees that are on the site.

The Church was everything to us. We went to lots of meetings, even more than we have today. We attended Primary on Thursday afternoons. Relief Society meetings were on Tuesday mornings. Mutual for the youth was Wednesday night. Saturday was for ward activities. On Sunday, men and young

men would go to priesthood meeting in the morning. Midday we would attend Sunday School. Then in the evening we returned for sacrament meeting. With comings and goings and meetings, it seemed our time was consumed with Church activities all day Sunday and most other days of the week.

As much as I loved the Church, it was during those boyhood days that, for the first time, I had a sense there was something even more. When I was five years old, a major conference was held at the tabernacle. We walked down the lane on which we lived and over a small bridge leading to the stately meetinghouse and sat on about the 10th row in the large chapel. Presiding and speaking at the meeting was David O. McKay, the President of the Church. I do not recall anything he said, but I vividly remember what I saw and what I felt. President McKay was dressed in a cream-colored suit and, with his wavy white hair, looked very regal. In the tradition of the islands, he wore a triple-thick red carnation lei. As he spoke, I felt something quite intense and very personal. I later understood that I was feeling the influence of the Holy Spirit. We sang the closing hymn.

Who's on the Lord's side? Who?

Now is the time to show.

We ask it fearlessly:

Who's on the Lord's side? Who?

(“Who’s on the Lord’s Side?” *Hymns*, no. 260)

With those words being sung by nearly 2,000 people but seeming to be a question posed just to me, I wanted to stand and say, “I am!”

Some have come to think of activity in the Church as the ultimate goal. Therein lies a danger. It is possible to be active in the Church and less active in the gospel. Let me stress: activity in the Church is a highly desirable goal; however, it is insufficient. Activity in the Church is an outward indication of our spiritual desire. If we attend our meetings, hold and fulfill Church responsibilities, and serve others, it is publicly observed.

By contrast, the things of the gospel are usually less visible and more difficult to measure, but they are of greater eternal importance. For example, how much faith do we really have?

How repentant are we? How meaningful are the ordinances in our lives? How focused are we on our covenants?

I repeat: we need the gospel *and* the Church. In fact, the purpose of the Church is to help us live the gospel. We often wonder: How can someone be fully active in the Church as a youth and then not be when they are older? How can an adult who has regularly attended and served stop coming? How can a person who was disappointed by a leader or another member allow that to end their Church participation? Perhaps the reason is they were not sufficiently converted to the gospel—the things of eternity.

I suggest three fundamental ways to have the gospel be our foundation:

1. *Deepen our understanding of Deity.* A sustained knowledge of and love for the three members of the Godhead are indispensable. Mindfully pray to the Father, in the name of the Son, and seek direction from the Holy Ghost. Couple prayer with constant study and humble pondering to continually build unshakable faith in Jesus Christ. “For how knoweth a man the master . . . who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart?” (Mosiah 5:13).
2. *Focus on the ordinances and covenants.* If there are any of the essential ordinances yet to be performed in your life, intently prepare to receive each of them. Then we need to establish the discipline to live faithful to our covenants, fully using the weekly gift of the sacrament. Many of us are not being regularly changed by its cleansing power because of our lack of reverence for this holy ordinance.
3. *Unite the gospel with the Church.* As we concentrate on the gospel, the Church will become more, not less, of a blessing in our lives. As we come to each meeting prepared to “seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118), the Holy Spirit will be our teacher. If we come to be entertained, we often will be disappointed. President Spencer W. Kimball was once asked, “What do you do when you find yourself in

a boring sacrament meeting?" His response: "I don't know. I've never been in one" (quoted by Gene R. Cook, in Gerry Avant, "Learning Gospel Is Lifetime Pursuit," *Church News*, Mar. 24, 1990, 10).

In our lives we should desire what occurred after the Lord came to the people of the New World and established His Church. The scriptures read, "And it came to pass that thus they [meaning His disciples] did go forth among all the people of Nephi, and did preach the gospel of Christ unto all people upon the face of the land; and they were converted unto the Lord, and were united unto the church of Christ, and thus the people of that generation were blessed" (3 Nephi 28:23).

The Lord wants the members of His Church to be fully converted to His gospel. This is the only sure way to have spiritual safety now and happiness forever. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

He Truly Loves Us

By Elder Paul E. Koelliker

Of the Seventy

Because of the heaven-designed pattern of the family, we more fully understand how our Heavenly Father truly loves each of us equally and fully.

I love being with the full-time missionaries. They are full of faith, hope, and genuine charity. Their missionary experience is like a minilife packaged in 18 to 24 months. They arrive as spiritual infants with a serious appetite to learn, and they leave as mature adults, seemingly ready to conquer any and all challenges placed before them. I also love the devoted senior missionaries, who are full of patience, wisdom, and calm assurance. They bring a gift of stability and love to the youthful energy that surrounds them. Together the young missionaries and the senior couples are a powerful, persevering force for good, which is having a profound effect on their lives and upon those who are touched by their service.

Recently I listened to two of these great young missionaries as they reviewed their experiences and efforts. In that reflective moment they considered the individuals they had contacted that day, some of whom were more responsive than others. As they considered the circumstances, they asked, "How can we help each individual develop a desire to know more about Heavenly Father? How do we help them feel His Spirit? How can we help them know that we love them?"

In my mind's eye I could see these two young men three or four years after completing their missions. I visualized them as having found their eternal companions and serving in an elders quorum or teaching a group of young men. Now, instead of thinking about their investigators, they were asking the same

questions about their quorum members or the young men they were commissioned to nurture. I saw how their missionary experience could be applied as a template for nurturing others throughout the rest of their lives. As this army of righteous disciples return from their missions to the many countries across the earth, they are becoming key contributors in the work of establishing the Church.

The Book of Mormon prophet Lehi might have been pondering the same set of questions as these missionaries when he listened to the response of his sons to the direction and vision he had been given: “And thus Laman and Lemuel, being the eldest, did murmur against their father. And they did murmur because they knew not the dealings of that God who had created them” (1 Nephi 2:12).

Perhaps we have each felt the frustration Lehi experienced with his two eldest sons. As we face a drifting child, an uncommitted investigator, or an unresponsive prospective elder, our hearts swell as Lehi’s did and we ask, how can I help them feel and listen to the Spirit so they are not caught up in worldly distractions? Two scriptures stand out in my mind that can help us find our way through these distractions and feel the power of God’s love.

Nephi gives a key to the door of learning through his own personal experience: “I, Nephi, . . . having great desires to know of the mysteries of God, wherefore, I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father; wherefore, I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers” (1 Nephi 2:16).

Awakening the desire to know enables our spiritual capacities to hear the voice of heaven. Finding a way to awaken and nurture that desire is the quest and responsibility of each of us—missionaries, parents, teachers, leaders, and members. As we feel that desire stirring in our hearts, we are prepared to benefit from the learning of the second scripture that I want to mention.

In June of 1831, as calls were being extended to early Church leaders, Joseph Smith was told that “Satan is abroad in the land, and he goeth forth deceiving the nations.” To combat this

distracting influence, the Lord said that He would give us “a pattern in all things, that [we] may not be deceived” (D&C 52:14).

Patterns are templates, guides, repeating steps, or paths one follows to stay aligned with God’s purpose. If followed, they will keep us humble, awake, and able to discern the voice of the Holy Spirit from those voices that distract us and lead us away. The Lord then instructs us, “He that trembleth under my power shall be made strong, and shall bring forth fruits of praise and wisdom, according to the revelations and truths which I have given you” (D&C 52:17).

The blessing of humble prayer, offered with real intent, allows the Holy Spirit to touch our hearts and helps us to remember what we knew before we were born into this mortal experience. As we clearly understand our Heavenly Father’s plan for us, we begin to acknowledge our responsibility to help others learn and understand His plan. Closely tied to helping others remember is the way we personally live the gospel and apply it in our lives. When we actually live the gospel in the pattern taught by the Lord Jesus Christ, our ability to help others increases. The following experience is an example of how this principle can work.

Two young missionaries knocked on a door, hoping to find someone to receive their message. The door opened, and a rather large man greeted them in a less-than-friendly voice: “I thought I told you not to knock on my door again. I warned you before that if you ever came back, it would not be a pleasant experience. Now leave me alone.” He quickly closed the door.

As the elders walked away, the older, more experienced missionary put his arm on the younger missionary’s shoulder to comfort and encourage him. Unknown to them, the man watched them through the window to be sure they understood his message. He fully expected to see them laugh and make light of his curt response to their attempted visit. However, as he witnessed the expression of kindness between the two missionaries, his heart was instantly softened. He reopened the door and asked the missionaries to come back and share their message with him.

It is when we yield to God's will and live His pattern that His Spirit is felt. The Savior taught, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). This principle of having love one to another and developing our ability to be Christ-centered in how we think, speak, and act is fundamental in becoming disciples of Christ and teachers of His gospel.

Awakening this desire prepares us to look for the promised patterns. Seeking for the patterns leads us to the doctrine of Christ as taught by the Savior and His prophet-leaders. One pattern of this doctrine is to endure to the end: "And blessed are they who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at that day, for they shall have the gift and the power of the Holy Ghost; and if they endure unto the end they shall be lifted up at the last day, and shall be saved in the everlasting kingdom of the Lamb" (1 Nephi 13:37).

What is the ultimate means by which we can enjoy the gift and power of the Holy Ghost? It is the power that comes by being faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. It is our *love* for Him and our fellowman. It is the Savior who defined the pattern of love when He taught us, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34).

President Gordon B. Hinckley confirmed this principle when he said: "To love the Lord is not just counsel; it is not just well-wishing. It is a commandment. . . . Love of God is the root of all virtue, of all goodness, of all strength of character, of all fidelity to do right" ("Words of the Living Prophet," *Liahona*, Dec. 1996, 8; "Excerpts from Recent Addresses of President Gordon B. Hinckley," *Ensign*, Apr. 1996, 73).

The Father's plan designated the pattern of the family to help us learn, apply, and understand the power of love. On the day my own family was organized, my sweet Ann and I went to the temple and entered into the covenant of marriage. How much I thought I loved her on that day, but I had only begun to see the vision of love. As each of our children and grandchildren entered into our lives, our love has been expanded to love each of them

equally and fully. There is seemingly no end to the expansive capacity to love.

The feeling of love from our Heavenly Father is like a gravitational pull from heaven. As we remove the distractions that pull us toward the world and exercise our agency to seek Him, we open our hearts to a celestial force which draws us toward Him. Nephi described its impact as “even unto the consuming of [his] flesh” (2 Nephi 4:21). This same power of love caused Alma to sing a “song of redeeming love” (Alma 5:26; see also verse 9). It touched Mormon in such a way that he counseled us to “pray . . . with all the energy of [our] heart” that we might be filled with His love (Moroni 7:48).

Both modern and ancient scripture are full of reminders of Heavenly Father’s eternal love for His children. I am confident that our Heavenly Father’s arms are constantly extended, ever ready to embrace each one of us and say to each one with that quiet, piercing voice, “I love you.”

Because of the heaven-designed pattern of the family, we more fully understand how our Heavenly Father truly loves each of us equally and fully. I testify that it is true. God does know and love us. He has given us a vision of His holy place and called prophets and apostles to teach the principles and the patterns that will bring us back to Him. As we strive to awaken the desire to know in ourselves and in others and as we live the patterns we discover, we will be drawn toward Him. I testify that Jesus is the very Son of God, our Exemplar, our beloved Redeemer, which I express in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Sacrifice

By Elder Dallin H. Oaks
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Our lives of service and sacrifice are the most appropriate expressions of our commitment to serve the Master and our fellowmen.

The atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ has been called the “most transcendent of all events from creation’s dawn to the endless ages of eternity.”¹ That sacrifice is the central message of all the prophets. It was prefigured by the animal sacrifices prescribed by the law of Moses. A prophet declared that their whole meaning “point[ed] to that great and last sacrifice [of] . . . the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal” (Alma 34:14). Jesus Christ endured incomprehensible suffering to make Himself a sacrifice for the sins of all. That sacrifice offered the ultimate good—the pure Lamb without blemish—for the ultimate measure of evil—the sins of the entire world. In the memorable words of Eliza R. Snow:

*His precious blood he freely spilt;
His life he freely gave,
A sinless sacrifice for guilt,
A dying world to save.²*

That sacrifice—the Atonement of Jesus Christ—is at the center of the plan of salvation.

The incomprehensible suffering of Jesus Christ ended sacrifice by the shedding of blood, but it did not end the importance of sacrifice in the gospel plan. Our Savior requires us to continue to offer sacrifices, but the sacrifices He now commands are that we “offer for a sacrifice unto [Him] a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 9:20). He also commands

each of us to love and serve one another—in effect, to offer a small imitation of His own sacrifice by making sacrifices of our own time and selfish priorities. In an inspired hymn, we sing, “Sacrifice brings forth the blessings of heaven.”³

I will speak of these mortal sacrifices our Savior asks us to make. This will not include sacrifices we are compelled to make or actions that may be motivated by personal advantage rather than service or sacrifice (see 2 Nephi 26:29).

I.

The Christian faith has a history of sacrifice, including the ultimate sacrifice. In the early years of the Christian era, Rome martyred thousands for their faith in Jesus Christ. In later centuries, as doctrinal controversies divided Christians, some groups persecuted and even put to death the members of other groups. Christians killed by other Christians are the most tragic martyrs of the Christian faith.

Many Christians have voluntarily given sacrifices motivated by faith in Christ and the desire to serve Him. Some have chosen to devote their entire adult lives to the service of the Master. This noble group includes those in the religious orders of the Catholic Church and those who have given lifelong service as Christian missionaries in various Protestant faiths. Their examples are challenging and inspiring, but most believers in Christ are neither expected nor able to devote their entire lives to religious service.

II.

For most followers of Christ, our sacrifices involve what we can do on a day-to-day basis in our ordinary personal lives. In that experience I know of no group whose members make more sacrifices than Latter-day Saints. Their sacrifices—your sacrifices, my brothers and sisters—stand in contrast to the familiar worldly quests for personal fulfillment.

My first examples are our Mormon pioneers. Their epic sacrifices of lives, family relationships, homes, and comforts are at the foundation of the restored gospel. Sarah Rich spoke for what motivated these pioneers when she described her husband, Charles, being called away on a mission: “This truly was a trying time for me as well as for my husband; but duty called us to part

for a season and knowing that we [were] obeying the will of the Lord, we felt to sacrifice our own feelings in order to help establish the work . . . of helping to build up the Kingdom of God on earth."⁴

Today the most visible strength of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the unselfish service and sacrifice of its members. Prior to the rededication of one of our temples, a Christian minister asked President Gordon B. Hinckley why it did not contain any representation of the cross, the most common symbol of the Christian faith. President Hinckley replied that the symbols of *our* Christian faith are "the lives of our people."⁵ Truly, our lives of service and sacrifice are the most appropriate expressions of our commitment to serve the Master and our fellowmen.

III.

We have no professionally trained and salaried clergy in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As a result, the lay members who are called to lead and serve our congregations must carry the whole load of our numerous Church meetings, programs, and activities. They do this in more than 14,000 congregations just in the United States and Canada. Of course, we are not unique in having lay members of our congregations serve as teachers and lay leaders. But the amount of time donated by our members to train and minister to one another is uniquely large. Our efforts to have each family in our congregations visited by home teachers each month and to have each adult woman visited by Relief Society visiting teachers each month are examples of this. We know of no comparable service in any organization in the world.

The best-known examples of unique LDS service and sacrifice are the work of our missionaries. Currently they number more than 50,000 young men and young women and over 5,000 adult men and women. They devote from six months to two years of their lives to teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and providing humanitarian service in more than 160 countries in the world. Their work always involves sacrifice, including the years they give to the work of the Lord and also the sacrifices made in providing funds for their support.

Those who remain at home—parents and other family members—also sacrifice by forgoing the companionship and service of the missionaries they send forth. For example, a young Brazilian received a missionary call while he was working to support his brothers and sisters after his father and mother died. A General Authority described these children’s meeting in council and remembering that their deceased parents had taught them that they should always be prepared to serve the Lord. The young man accepted his missionary call, and a 16-year-old brother took over the responsibility of working to support the family.⁶ Most of us know of many other examples of sacrifice to serve a mission or to support a missionary. We know of no other voluntary service and sacrifice like this in any other organization in the world.

We are frequently asked, “How do you persuade your young people and your older members to leave their schooling or their retirement to sacrifice in this way?” I have heard many give this explanation: “Knowing what my Savior did for me—His grace in suffering for my sins and in overcoming death so I can live again—I feel privileged to make the small sacrifice I am asked to make in His service. I want to share the understanding He has given me.” How do we persuade such followers of Christ to serve? As a prophet explained, “We [just] ask them.”⁷

Other sacrifices resulting from missionary service are the sacrifices of those who act on the teachings of the missionaries and become members of the Church. For many converts, these sacrifices are very significant, including the loss of friends and family associations.

Many years ago this conference heard of a young man who found the restored gospel while he was studying in the United States. As this man was about to return to his native land, President Gordon B. Hinckley asked him what would happen to him when he returned home as a Christian. “My family will be disappointed,” the young man answered. “They may cast me out and regard me as dead. As for my future and my career, all opportunity may be foreclosed against me.”

“Are you willing to pay so great a price for the gospel?” President Hinckley asked.

Tearfully the young man answered, "It's true, isn't it?" When that was affirmed, he replied, "Then what else matters?"⁸ That is the spirit of sacrifice among many of our new members.

Other examples of service and sacrifice appear in the lives of the faithful members who serve in our temples. Temple service is unique to Latter-day Saints, but the significance of such sacrifice should be understandable to all Christians. Latter-day Saints have no tradition of service in a monastery, but we can still understand and honor the sacrifice of those whose Christian faith motivates them to devote their lives to that religious activity.

In this conference just a year ago, President Thomas S. Monson shared an example of sacrifice in connection with temple service. A faithful Latter-day Saint father on a remote island in the Pacific did heavy physical work in a faraway place for six years to earn the money necessary to take his wife and 10 children for marriage and sealing for eternity in the New Zealand Temple. President Monson explained, "Those who understand the eternal blessings which come from the temple know that no sacrifice is too great, no price too heavy, no struggle too difficult in order to receive those blessings."⁹

I am grateful for the marvelous examples of Christian love, service, and sacrifice I have seen among the Latter-day Saints. I see you performing your Church callings, often at great sacrifice of time and means. I see you serving missions at your own expense. I see you cheerfully donating your professional skills in service to your fellowmen. I see you caring for the poor through personal efforts and through supporting Church welfare and humanitarian contributions.¹⁰ All of this is affirmed in a nationwide study which concluded that active members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints "volunteer and donate significantly more than the average American and are even more generous in time and money than the upper [20 percent] of religious people in America."¹¹

Such examples of giving to others strengthen all of us. They remind us of the Savior's teaching:

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself. . . .

"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 16:24–25).

IV.

Perhaps the most familiar and most important examples of unselfish service and sacrifice are performed in our families. Mothers devote themselves to the bearing and nurturing of their children. Husbands give themselves to supporting their wives and children. The sacrifices involved in the eternally important service to our families are too numerous to mention and too familiar to need mention.

I also see unselfish Latter-day Saints adopting children, including those with special needs, and seeking to provide foster children the hope and opportunities denied them by earlier circumstances. I see you caring for family members and neighbors who suffer from birth defects, mental and physical ailments, and the effects of advancing years. The Lord sees you also, and He has caused His prophets to declare that “as you sacrifice for each other and your children, the Lord will bless you.”¹²

I believe that Latter-day Saints who give unselfish service and sacrifice in worshipful imitation of our Savior adhere to eternal values to a greater extent than any other group of people. Latter-day Saints look on their sacrifices of time and means as a part of their schooling and qualifying for eternity. This is a truth revealed in the *Lectures on Faith*, which teach that “a religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation. . . . It [is] through this sacrifice, and this only, that God has ordained that men should enjoy eternal life.”¹³

Just as the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ is at the center of the plan of salvation, we followers of Christ must make our own sacrifices to prepare for the destiny that plan provides for us.

I know that Jesus Christ is the Only Begotten Son of God the Eternal Father. I know that because of His atoning sacrifice, we have the assurance of immortality and the opportunity for eternal life. He is our Lord, our Savior, and our Redeemer, and I testify of Him in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ* (1981), 218.
2. "How Great the Wisdom and the Love," *Hymns*, no. 195.
3. "Praise to the Man," *Hymns*, no. 27.
4. Sarah Rich, in Guinevere Thomas Woolstenhulme, "I Have Seen Many Miracles," in Richard E. Turley Jr. and Brittany A. Chapman, eds., *Women of Faith in the Latter Days: Volume 1, 1775–1820* (2011), 283.
5. Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Symbol of Our Faith," *Liahona and Ensign*, Apr. 2005, 3.
6. See Harold G. Hillam, "Sacrifice in the Service," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 42.
7. Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Miracle of Faith," *Liahona*, July 2001, 84; *Ensign*, May 2001, 68.
8. Gordon B. Hinckley, "It's True, Isn't It?" *Tambuli*, Oct. 1993, 3–4; *Ensign*, July 1993, 2; see also Neil L. Andersen, "It's True, Isn't It? Then What Else Matters?" *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2007, 74.
9. Thomas S. Monson, "The Holy Temple—a Beacon to the World," *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2011, 91–92.
10. See, for example, Naomi Schaefer Riley, "What the Mormons Know about Welfare," *Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 18, 2012, A11.
11. Ram Cnaan and others, "Called to Serve: The Prosocial Behavior of Active Latter-day Saints" (draft), 16.
12. Ezra Taft Benson, "To the Single Adult Brethren of the Church," *Ensign*, May 1988, 53.
13. *Lectures on Faith* (1985), 69.

Mountains to Climb

By President Henry B. Eyring
First Counselor in the First Presidency

If we have faith in Jesus Christ, the hardest as well as the easiest times in life can be a blessing.

I heard President Spencer W. Kimball, in a session of conference, ask that God would give him mountains to climb. He said: "There are great challenges ahead of us, giant opportunities to be met. I welcome that exciting prospect and feel to say to the Lord, humbly, 'Give me this mountain,' give me these challenges."¹

My heart was stirred, knowing, as I did, some of the challenges and adversity he had already faced. I felt a desire to be more like him, a valiant servant of God. So one night I prayed for a test to prove my courage. I can remember it vividly. In the evening I knelt in my bedroom with a faith that seemed almost to fill my heart to bursting.

Within a day or two my prayer was answered. The hardest trial of my life surprised and humbled me. It provided me a twofold lesson. First, I had clear proof that God heard and answered my prayer of faith. But second, I began a tutorial that still goes on to learn about why I felt with such confidence that night that a great blessing could come from adversity to more than compensate for any cost.

The adversity that hit me in that faraway day now seems tiny compared to what has come since—to me and to those I love. Many of you are now passing through physical, mental, and emotional trials that could cause you to cry out as did one great and faithful servant of God I knew well. His nurse heard him exclaim from his bed of pain, "When I have tried all my life to be good, why has this happened to me?"

You know how the Lord answered that question for the Prophet Joseph Smith in his prison cell:

“And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.

“The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?

“Therefore, hold on thy way, and the priesthood shall remain with thee; for their bounds are set, they cannot pass. Thy days are known, and thy years shall not be numbered less; therefore, fear not what man can do, for God shall be with you forever and ever.”²

There seems to me no better answer to the question of why trials come and what we are to do than the words of the Lord Himself, who passed through trials for us more terrible than we can imagine.

You remember His words when He counseled that we should, out of faith in Him, repent:

“Therefore I command you to repent—repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and your sufferings be sore—how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not.

“For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent;

“But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I;

“Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—

“Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men.”³

You and I have faith that the way to rise through and above trials is to believe that there is a “balm in Gilead”⁴ and that the

Lord has promised, "I will not . . . forsake thee."⁵ That is what President Thomas S. Monson has taught us to help us and those we serve in what seem lonely and overwhelming trials.⁶

But President Monson has also wisely taught that a foundation of faith in the reality of those promises takes time to build. You may have seen the need for that foundation, as I have, at the bedside of someone ready to give up the fight to endure to the end. If the foundation of faith is not embedded in our hearts, the power to endure will crumble.

My purpose today is to describe what I know of how we can lay that unshakable foundation. I do it with great humility for two reasons. First, what I say could discourage some who are struggling in the midst of great adversity and feel their foundation of faith is crumbling. And second, I know that ever-greater tests lie before me before the end of life. Therefore, the prescription I offer you has yet to be proven in my own life through enduring to the end.

As a young man I worked with a contractor building footings and foundations for new houses. In the summer heat it was hard work to prepare the ground for the form into which we poured the cement for the footing. There were no machines. We used a pick and a shovel. Building lasting foundations for buildings was hard work in those days.

It also required patience. After we poured the footing, we waited for it to cure. Much as we wanted to keep the jobs moving, we also waited after the pour of the foundation before we took away the forms.

And even more impressive to a novice builder was what seemed to be a tedious and time-consuming process to put metal bars carefully inside the forms to give the finished foundation strength.

In a similar way, the ground must be carefully prepared for our foundation of faith to withstand the storms that will come into every life. That solid basis for a foundation of faith is personal integrity.

Our choosing the right consistently whenever the choice is placed before us creates the solid ground under our faith. It can begin in childhood since every soul is born with the free gift of

the Spirit of Christ. With that Spirit we can know when we have done what is right before God and when we have done wrong in His sight.

Those choices, hundreds in most days, prepare the solid ground on which our edifice of faith is built. The metal framework around which the substance of our faith is poured is the gospel of Jesus Christ, with all its covenants, ordinances, and principles.

One of the keys to an enduring faith is to judge correctly the curing time required. That is why I was unwise to pray so soon in my life for higher mountains to climb and greater tests.

That curing does not come automatically through the passage of time, but it does take time. Getting older does not do it alone. It is serving God and others persistently with full heart and soul that turns testimony of truth into unbreakable spiritual strength.

Now, I wish to encourage those who are in the midst of hard trials, who feel their faith may be fading under the onslaught of troubles. Trouble itself can be your way to strengthen and finally gain unshakable faith. Moroni, the son of Mormon in the Book of Mormon, told us how that blessing could come to pass. He teaches the simple and sweet truth that acting on even a twig of faith allows God to grow it:

“And now, I, Moroni, would speak somewhat concerning these things; I would show unto the world that faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith.

“For it was by faith that Christ showed himself unto our fathers, after he had risen from the dead; and he showed not himself unto them until after they had faith in him; wherefore, it must needs be that some had faith in him, for he showed himself not unto the world.

“But because of the faith of men he has shown himself unto the world, and glorified the name of the Father, and prepared a way that thereby others might be partakers of the heavenly gift, that they might hope for those things which they have not seen.

“Wherefore, ye may also have hope, and be partakers of the gift, if ye will but have faith.”⁷

That particle of faith most precious and which you should protect and use to whatever extent you can is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Moroni taught the power of that faith this way: "And neither at any time hath any wrought miracles until after their faith; wherefore they first believed in the Son of God."⁸

I have visited with a woman who received the miracle of sufficient strength to endure unimaginable losses with just the simple capacity to repeat endlessly the words "I know that my Redeemer lives."⁹ That faith and those words of testimony were still there in the mist that obscured but did not erase memories of her childhood.

I was stunned to learn that another woman had forgiven a person who had wronged her for years. I was surprised and asked her why she had chosen to forgive and forget so many years of spiteful abuse.

She said quietly, "It was the hardest thing I have ever done, but I just knew I had to do it. So I did." Her faith that the Savior would forgive her if she forgave others prepared her with a feeling of peace and hope as she faced death just months after she had forgiven her unrepentant adversary.

She asked me, "When I get there, how will it be in heaven?"

And I said, "I know just from what I have seen of your capacity to exercise faith and to forgive that it will be a wonderful homecoming for you."

I have another encouragement to those who now wonder if their faith in Jesus Christ will be sufficient for them to endure well to the end. I was blessed to have known others of you who are listening now when you were younger, vibrant, gifted beyond most of those around you, yet you chose to do what the Savior would have done. Out of your abundance you found ways to help and care for those you might have ignored or looked down upon from your place in life.

When hard trials come, the faith to endure them well will be there, built as you may now notice but may have not at the time that you acted on the pure love of Christ, serving and forgiving others as the Savior would have done. You built a foundation of faith from loving as the Savior loved and serving for Him. Your faith in Him led to acts of charity that will bring you hope.

It is never too late to strengthen the foundation of faith. There is always time. With faith in the Savior, you can repent and plead for forgiveness. There is someone you can forgive. There is someone you can thank. There is someone you can serve and lift. You can do it wherever you are and however alone and deserted you may feel.

I cannot promise an end to your adversity in this life. I cannot assure you that your trials will seem to you to be only for a moment. One of the characteristics of trials in life is that they seem to make clocks slow down and then appear almost to stop.

There are reasons for that. Knowing those reasons may not give much comfort, but it can give you a feeling of patience. Those reasons come from this one fact: in Their perfect love for you, Heavenly Father and the Savior want you fitted to be with Them to live in families forever. Only those washed perfectly clean through the Atonement of Jesus Christ can be there.

My mother fought cancer for nearly 10 years. Treatments and surgeries and finally confinement to her bed were some of her trials.

I remember my father saying as he watched her take her last breath, "A little girl has gone home to rest."

One of the speakers at her funeral was President Spencer W. Kimball. Among the tributes he paid, I remember one that went something like this: "Some of you may have thought that Mildred suffered so long and so much because of something she had done wrong that required the trials." He then said, "No, it was that God just wanted her to be polished a little more." I remember at the time thinking, "If a woman that good needed that much polishing, what is ahead for me?"

If we have faith in Jesus Christ, the hardest as well as the easiest times in life can be a blessing. In all conditions, we can choose the right with the guidance of the Spirit. We have the gospel of Jesus Christ to shape and guide our lives if we choose it. And with prophets revealing to us our place in the plan of salvation, we can live with perfect hope and a feeling of peace. We never need to feel that we are alone or unloved in the Lord's service because we never are. We can feel the love of God. The

Savior has promised angels on our left and our right to bear us up.¹⁰ And He always keeps His word.

I testify that God the Father lives and that His Beloved Son is our Redeemer. The Holy Ghost has confirmed truth in this conference and will again as you seek it, as you listen, and as you later study the messages of the Lord's authorized servants, who are here. President Thomas S. Monson is the Lord's prophet to the entire world. The Lord watches over you. God the Father lives. His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, is our Redeemer. His love is unfailing. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Spencer W. Kimball, "Give Me This Mountain," *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 79.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 122:7-9.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 19:15-19.
4. Jeremiah 8:22.
5. Joshua 1:5.
6. See Thomas S. Monson, "Look to God and Live," *Ensign*, May 1998, 52-54.
7. Ether 12:6-9.
8. Ether 12:18.
9. "I Know That My Redeemer Lives," *Hymns*, no. 136.
10. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:88.

The Sustaining of Church Officers

Presented by President Dieter F. Uchtdorf

Second Counselor in the First Presidency

It is proposed that we sustain Thomas Spencer Monson as prophet, seer, and revelator and President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Henry Bennion Eyring as First Counselor in the First Presidency; and Dieter Friedrich Uchtdorf as Second Counselor in the First Presidency.

Those in favor may manifest it.

Those opposed, if any, may manifest it.

It is proposed that we sustain Boyd Kenneth Packer as President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and the following as members of that quorum: Boyd K. Packer, L. Tom Perry, Russell M. Nelson, Dallin H. Oaks, M. Russell Ballard, Richard G. Scott, Robert D. Hales, Jeffrey R. Holland, David A. Bednar, Quentin L. Cook, D. Todd Christofferson, and Neil L. Andersen.

Those in favor, please manifest it.

Any opposed may so indicate.

It is proposed that we sustain the counselors in the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators.

All in favor, please manifest it.

Contrary, if there be any, by the same sign.

Elder Steven E. Snow has been released as a member of the Presidency of the Quorums of the Seventy.

Those who can join with us in a vote of appreciation, please manifest it.

It is proposed that we sustain Elder Richard J. Maynes as a member of the Presidency of the Quorums of the Seventy.

All in favor, please manifest it.

Those opposed, if any.

It is proposed that we release with a vote of appreciation Elders Gérald Jean Caussé and Gary E. Stevenson as members of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

All in favor, please manifest it.

After many years of faithful and effective service, it is proposed that we release Bishops H. David Burton, Richard C. Edgley, and Keith B. McMullin as the Presiding Bishopric and designate them as emeritus General Authorities.

Those who can join with us in a vote of appreciation, please manifest it.

It is proposed that we release the following as Area Seventies effective on May 1, 2012:

Richard K. Ahadjie, Climato C. A. Almeida, Fernando J. D. Araújo, Marvin T. Brinkerhoff, Mario L. Carlos, Rafael E. Castro, David L. Cook, César A. Dávila, Mosiah S. Delgado, Luis G. Duarte, Juan A. Etchegaray, Stephen L. Fluckiger, J. Roger Fluhman, Robert C. Gay, Miguel Hidalgo, Garith C. Hill, David J. Hoare, David H. Ingram, Tetsuji Ishii, Kapumba T. Kola, Glendon Lyons, R. Bruce Merrell, Enrique J. Montoya, Daniel A. Moreno, Adesina J. Olukanni, Gamaliel Osorno, Patrick H. Price, Marcos A. Prieto, Paulo R. Puerta, Carlos F. Rivas, A. Ricardo Sant'Ana, Fabian L. Sinamban, Natã C. Tobias, Stanley Wan, Perry M. Webb, Richard W. Wheeler, and Scott D. Whiting.

Those who wish to join us in expressing our gratitude for their excellent service, please manifest it.

It is proposed that we release with a vote of sincere appreciation Sisters Julie B. Beck, Silvia H. Allred, and Barbara Thompson as the Relief Society general presidency.

We likewise extend a release to members of the Relief Society general board.

All who wish to join us in expressing appreciation to these sisters for their remarkable service and devotion, please manifest it.

It is proposed that we sustain as new members of the First Quorum of the Seventy Craig A. Cardon, Stanley G. Ellis, Larry Echo Hawk, Robert C. Gay, and Scott D. Whiting.

All in favor, please manifest it.

Those opposed, by the same sign.

It is proposed that we sustain Gary E. Stevenson as Presiding Bishop of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, with Gérald Jean Caussé as First Counselor and Dean Myron Davies as Second Counselor.

Those in favor, please manifest it.

Any opposed.

It is proposed that we sustain the following as new Area Seventies:

Pedro U. Adduru, Detlef H. Adler, Angel H. Alarcon, Aley K. Auna Jr., W. Mark Bassett, Robert M. Call, Hernando Camargo, Gene R. Chidester, Joaquin E. Costa, Ralph L. Dewsnup, Ángel A. Duarte, Edward Dube, Moroni Gaona, Taylor G. Godoy, Francisco D. N. Granja, Yuriy A. Gushchin, Richard K. Hansen, Todd B. Hansen, Clifford T. Herbertson, Aniefiok Udo Inyon, Luiz M. Leal, Alejandro Lopez, L. Jean Claude Mabaya, Alvin F. Meredith III, Adonay S. Obando, Jared R. Ocampo, Adeyinka A. Ojadiran, Andrew M. O’Riordan, Jesus A. Ortiz, Fred A. Parker, Siu Hong Pon, Abraham E. Quero, Robert Clare Rhien, Jorge Luis Romeu, Jorge Saldívar, Gordon H. Smith, Alin Spannaus, Moroni B. Torgan, Steven L. Toronto, and Daniel Yirenya-Tawiah.

All in favor, please signify.

Any opposed.

It is proposed that we sustain Linda Kjar Burton as general president of the Relief Society, with Carole Manzel Stephens as first counselor and Linda Sheffield Reeves as second counselor.

Those in favor, please manifest.

Any opposed may so signify.

It is proposed that we sustain the other General Authorities, Area Seventies, and general auxiliary presidencies as presently constituted.

Those in favor, please manifest it.

Any opposed may manifest it.

President Monson, insofar as I have been able to observe, the voting in the Conference Center has been unanimous in favor of the proposals made.

Thank you, brothers and sisters, for your sustaining vote and your continued faith, devotion, and prayers.

We invite the newly called General Authorities and Relief Society general presidency to come forward and take their places on the stand.

Church Auditing Department Report, 2011

Presented by Robert W. Cantwell

Managing Director, Church Auditing Department

*To the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of
Latter-day Saints*

Dear Brethren: As prescribed by revelation in section 120 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Council on the Disposition of the Tithes authorizes the expenditure of Church funds. This council is composed of the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and the Presiding Bishopric.

This council approves budgets for Church departments, operations, and related allocations to ecclesiastical units. Church entities expend funds consistent with approved budgets and in accordance with Church policies and procedures.

The Church Auditing Department has been granted access to all records and systems necessary to evaluate the adequacy of controls for receipts of funds, expenditures, and safeguarding of Church assets. The Church Auditing Department is independent of all other Church departments and operations, and the staff consists of certified public accountants, certified internal auditors, certified information systems auditors, and other credentialed professionals.

Based upon audits performed, the Church Auditing Department is of the opinion that in all material respects, contributions received, expenditures made, and assets of the Church for the year 2011 have been recorded and administered in accordance with appropriate accounting practices, approved budgets, and Church policies and procedures.

Respectfully submitted,
Church Auditing Department
Robert W. Cantwell
Managing Director

Statistical Report, 2011

Presented by Brook P. Hales
Secretary to the First Presidency

For the information of the members of the Church, the First Presidency has issued the following statistical report concerning the growth and status of the Church as of December 31, 2011.

Church Units

Stakes	2,946
Missions	340
Districts	608
Wards and Branches	28,784

Church Membership

Total Membership	14,441,346
New Children of Record during 2011	119,917
Converts Baptized during 2011	281,312

Missionaries

Full-Time Missionaries	55,410
Church-Service Missionaries	22,299

Temples

Temples Dedicated during 2011 (San Salvador El Salvador and Quetzaltenango Guatemala)	2
Temples Rededicated during 2011 (Atlanta Georgia)	1
Temples in Operation	136

Former General Church Officers and Others Who Have Passed Away since Last April General Conference

Elders Marion D. Hanks, Jack H Goaslind Jr., Monte J. Brough, Ronald E. Poelman, Keith W. Wilcox, and Harold G. Hillam, all former members of the Quorums of the Seventy; Sisters Joy F. Evans and Chieko N. Okazaki, former counselors in the Relief Society general presidency; Sister Norma Voloy Sonntag, wife of Elder Philip T. Sonntag, a former member of the Seventy; Sister Leola George, widow of Elder Lloyd P. George, a former member of the Seventy; Sister Argelia Villanueva de Alvarez, wife of Elder Lino Alvarez, also a former member of the Seventy; and Brother Wendell M. Smoot Jr., former president of the Tabernacle Choir.

The Laborers in the Vineyard

By Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Please listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit telling you right now, this very moment, that you should accept the atoning gift of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In light of the calls and releases the First Presidency has just announced, may I speak for all of us in saying we will remember and love always those who have served so faithfully, just as we immediately love and welcome those who now come into office. Our heartfelt thanks to every one of you.

I wish to speak of the Savior's parable in which a householder "went out early in the morning to hire labourers." After employing the first group at 6:00 in the morning, he returned at 9:00 a.m., at 12:00 noon, and at 3:00 in the afternoon, hiring more workers as the urgency of the harvest increased. The scripture says he came back a final time, "about the eleventh hour" (approximately 5:00 p.m.), and hired a concluding number. Then just an hour later, all the workers gathered to receive their day's wage. Surprisingly, all received the *same* wage in spite of the different hours of labor. Immediately, those hired first were angry, saying, "These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day."¹ When reading this parable, perhaps you, as well as those workers, have felt there was an injustice being done here. Let me speak briefly to that concern.

First of all it is important to note that *no one* has been treated unfairly here. The first workers agreed to the full wage of the day, and they received it. Furthermore, they were, I can only imagine,

very grateful to get the work. In the time of the Savior, an average man and his family could not do much more than live on what they made that day. If you didn't work or farm or fish or sell, you likely didn't eat. With more prospective workers than jobs, these first men chosen were the most fortunate in the entire labor pool that morning.

Indeed, if there is any sympathy to be generated, it should at least initially be for the men *not* chosen who also had mouths to feed and backs to clothe. Luck never seemed to be with some of them. With each visit of the steward throughout the day, they always saw someone else chosen.

But just at day's close, the householder returns a surprising fifth time with a remarkable eleventh-hour offer! These last and most discouraged of laborers, hearing only that they will be treated fairly, accept work without even knowing the wage, knowing that *anything* will be better than nothing, which is what they have had so far. Then as they gather for their payment, they are stunned to receive the same as all the others! How awestruck they must have been and how very, very grateful! Surely never had such compassion been seen in all their working days.

It is with that reading of the story that I feel the grumbling of the first laborers must be seen. As the householder in the parable tells them (and I paraphrase only slightly): "My friends, I am not being unfair to you. You agreed on the wage for the day, a good wage. You were very happy to get the work, and I am very happy with the way you served. You are paid in full. Take your pay and enjoy the blessing. As for the others, *surely I am free to do what I like with my own money.*" Then this piercing question to anyone then or now who needs to hear it: "*Why should you be jealous because I choose to be kind?*"

Brothers and sisters, there are going to be times in our lives when someone else gets an unexpected blessing or receives some special recognition. May I plead with us not to be hurt—and certainly not to feel envious—when good fortune comes to another person? We are not diminished when someone else is added upon. We are not in a race against each other to see who is the wealthiest or the most talented or the most beautiful or even

the most blessed. The race we are *really* in is the race against sin, and surely envy is one of the most universal of those.

Furthermore, envy is a mistake that just keeps on giving. Obviously we suffer a little when some *misfortune* befalls *us*, but envy requires us to suffer all *good fortune* that befalls *everyone* we know! What a bright prospect that is—downing another quart of pickle juice every time anyone around you has a happy moment! To say nothing of the chagrin in the end, when we find that God really is both just and merciful, giving to all who stand with Him “all that he hath,”² as the scripture says. So lesson number one from the Lord’s vineyard: coveting, pouting, or tearing others down does *not* elevate *your* standing, nor does demeaning someone else improve your self-image. So be kind, and be grateful that God is kind. It is a happy way to live.

A second point I wish to take from this parable is the sorrowful mistake some could make if they were to forgo the receipt of their wages at the *end* of the day because they were preoccupied with perceived problems *earlier* in the day. It doesn’t say here that anyone threw his coin in the householder’s face and stormed off penniless, but I suppose one might have.

My beloved brothers and sisters, what happened in this story at 9:00 or noon or 3:00 is swept up in the grandeur of the universally generous payment at the end of the day. The formula of faith is to hold on, work on, see it through, and let the distress of earlier hours—real or imagined—fall away in the abundance of the final reward. Don’t dwell on old issues or grievances—not toward yourself nor your neighbor nor even, I might add, toward this true and living Church. The majesty of your life, of your neighbor’s life, and of the gospel of Jesus Christ will be made manifest at the last day, even if such majesty is not always recognized by everyone in the early going. So don’t hyperventilate about something that happened at 9:00 in the morning when the grace of God is trying to reward you at 6:00 in the evening—whatever your labor arrangements have been through the day.

We consume such precious emotional and spiritual capital clinging tenaciously to the memory of a discordant note we struck in a childhood piano recital, or something a spouse said or

did 20 years ago that we are determined to hold over his or her head for another 20, or an incident in Church history that proved no more or less than that mortals will always struggle to measure up to the immortal hopes placed before them. Even if one of those grievances did not originate with you, it can end with you. And what a reward there will be for that contribution when the Lord of the vineyard looks you in the eye and accounts are settled at the end of our earthly day.

Which leads me to my third and last point. This parable—like all parables—is not really about laborers or wages any more than the others are about sheep and goats. This is a story about God’s goodness, His patience and forgiveness, and the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a story about generosity and compassion. It is a story about grace. It underscores the thought I heard many years ago that surely the thing God enjoys most about being God is the thrill of being merciful, especially to those who don’t expect it and often feel they don’t deserve it.

I do not know who in this vast audience today may need to hear the message of forgiveness inherent in this parable, but however late you think you are, however many chances you think you have missed, however many mistakes you feel you have made or talents you think you don’t have, or however far from home and family and God you feel you have traveled, I testify that you have *not* traveled beyond the reach of divine love. It is not possible for you to sink lower than the infinite light of Christ’s Atonement shines.

Whether you are not yet of our faith or were with us once and have not remained, there is nothing in either case that you have done that cannot be undone. There is no problem which you cannot overcome. There is no dream that in the unfolding of time and eternity cannot yet be realized. Even if you feel you are the lost and last laborer of the eleventh hour, the Lord of the vineyard still stands beckoning. “Come boldly [to] the throne of grace,”³ and fall at the feet of the Holy One of Israel. Come and feast “without money and without price”⁴ at the table of the Lord.

I especially make an appeal for husbands and fathers, priesthood bearers or prospective priesthood bearers, to, as Lehi said, “Awake! and arise from the dust . . . and be men.”⁵ Not

always but often it is the men who choose not to answer the call to “come join the ranks.”⁶ Women and children frequently seem more willing. Brethren, step up. Do it for your sake. Do it for the sake of those who love you and are praying that you will respond. Do it for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ, who paid an unfathomable price for the future He wants you to have.

My beloved brothers and sisters, to those of you who have been blessed by the gospel for many years because you were fortunate enough to find it early, to those of you who have come to the gospel by stages and phases later, and to those of you—members and not yet members—who may still be hanging back, to each of you, one and all, I testify of the renewing power of God’s love and the miracle of His grace. *His concern is for the faith at which you finally arrive, not the hour of the day in which you got there.*

So if you have made covenants, keep them. If you haven’t made them, make them. If you have made them and broken them, repent and repair them. It is *never* too late so long as the Master of the vineyard says there is time. Please listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit telling you right now, this very moment, that you should accept the atoning gift of the Lord Jesus Christ and enjoy the fellowship of His labor. Don’t delay. It’s getting late. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Matthew 20:1–15.
2. Luke 12:44.
3. Hebrews 4:16.
4. Isaiah 55:1.
5. 2 Nephi 1:14, 21.
6. “We Are All Enlisted,” *Hymns*, no. 250.

Coming to Ourselves: The Sacrament, the Temple, and Sacrifice in Service

By Elder Robert D. Hales

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

We become converted and spiritually self-reliant as we prayerfully live our covenants.

The Savior told His disciples about a son who left his wealthy father, went to a far country, and wasted his inheritance. When a famine arose, the young man took the lowly job of feeding swine. He was so hungry that he wanted to eat the husks meant for the animals.

Away from home, far from the place he wanted to be, and in his destitute condition, something of eternal significance happened in the life of this young man. In the Savior's words, "he came to himself."¹ He remembered who he was, realized what he had been missing, and began to desire the blessings freely available in his father's house.

Throughout our lives, whether in times of darkness, challenge, sorrow, or sin, we may feel the Holy Ghost reminding us that we are truly sons and daughters of a caring Heavenly Father, who loves us, and we may hunger for the sacred blessings that only He can provide. At these times we should strive to *come to ourselves* and come back into the light of our Savior's love.

These blessings rightfully belong to all of Heavenly Father's children. Desiring these blessings, including a life of joy and happiness, is an essential part of Heavenly Father's plan for each one of us. The prophet Alma taught, "Even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you."²

As our spiritual desires increase, we become spiritually self-reliant. How, then, do we help others, ourselves, and our families increase our desires to follow the Savior and live His gospel? How do we strengthen our desires to repent, become worthy, and endure to the end? How do we help our youth and young adults let these desires work in them until they are converted and become true “saint[s] through the atonement of Christ”?³

We become converted and spiritually self-reliant as we prayerfully live our covenants—through worthily partaking of the sacrament, being worthy of a temple recommend, and sacrificing to serve others.

To worthily partake of the sacrament, we remember that we are renewing the covenant we made at baptism. For the sacrament to be a spiritually cleansing experience each week, we need to prepare ourselves *before* coming to sacrament meeting. We do this by deliberately leaving behind our daily work and recreation and letting go of worldly thoughts and concerns. As we do, we make room in our minds and hearts for the Holy Ghost.

Then we are prepared to ponder on the Atonement. More than just thinking about the facts of the Savior’s suffering and death, our pondering helps us to recognize that through the Savior’s sacrifice, we have the hope, opportunity, and strength to make real, heartfelt changes in our lives.

As we sing the sacrament hymn, participate in the sacrament prayers, and partake of the emblems of His flesh and blood, we prayerfully seek forgiveness for our sins and shortcomings. We think about the promises we made and kept during the previous week and make specific personal commitments to follow the Savior during the coming week.

Parents and leaders, you can help youth experience the incomparable blessings of the sacrament by providing special opportunities for them to study, discuss, and discover the relevance of the Atonement in their lives. Let them search the scriptures for themselves and teach one another from their own experiences.

Fathers, priesthood leaders, and quorum presidencies have a special responsibility to help Aaronic Priesthood holders

earnestly prepare to perform their sacred sacrament duties. This preparation is made throughout the week by living gospel standards. When young men prepare, bless, and pass the sacrament in worthiness and reverence, they literally follow the example of the Savior at the Last Supper⁴ and become like Him.

I testify that the sacrament gives us an opportunity to *come to ourselves* and experience “a mighty change” of heart⁵—to remember who we are and what we most desire. As we renew the covenant to keep the commandments, we obtain the companionship of the Holy Ghost to lead us back into our Heavenly Father’s presence. No wonder we are commanded to “meet together oft to partake of [the] bread and [water]”⁶ and to partake of the sacrament to our souls.⁷

Our desires to return to Heavenly Father increase as we, in addition to taking the sacrament, become worthy to obtain a temple recommend. We become worthy by steadily and steadfastly obeying the commandments. This obedience begins in childhood and intensifies through experiences in the Aaronic Priesthood and Young Women during the years of preparation. Then, hopefully, priests and Laurels set goals and specifically prepare themselves to be endowed and sealed in the temple.

What are the standards for recommend holders? The Psalmist reminds us:

“Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?

“He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart.”⁸

Worthiness to hold a temple recommend gives us the strength to keep our temple covenants. How do we personally gain that strength? We strive to obtain a testimony of Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Ghost, the reality of the Atonement, and the truthfulness of the Prophet Joseph Smith and the Restoration. We sustain our leaders, treat our families with kindness, stand as a witness of the Lord’s true Church, attend our Church meetings, honor our covenants, fulfill parental obligations, and live a virtuous life. You may say that sounds like just being a faithful Latter-day Saint! You are right. The standard for temple recommend holders is not too high for us to achieve. It is simply to faithfully live the gospel and follow the prophets.

Then, as endowed temple recommend holders, we establish patterns of Christlike living. These include obedience, making sacrifices to keep the commandments, loving one another, being chaste in thought and action, and giving of ourselves to build the kingdom of God. Through the Savior's Atonement and by following these basic patterns of faithfulness, we receive "power from on high"⁹ to face the challenges of life. We need this divine power today more than ever. It is power we receive only through temple ordinances. I testify that the sacrifices we make to receive temple ordinances are worth every effort we can make.

As our desires to learn and live the gospel increase, we naturally seek to serve one another. The Savior said to Peter, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."¹⁰ I am impressed that today's youth have deep desires to serve and bless others—to make a difference in this world. They also crave the joy that their service brings.

However, it is difficult for youth to understand how present actions will prepare them for or disqualify them from future service opportunities. All of us have an "imperative duty"¹¹ to assist our youth in preparing for lifelong service by helping them become self-reliant. In addition to the spiritual self-reliance we have been discussing, there is temporal self-reliance, which includes getting a postsecondary education or vocational training, learning to work, and living within our means. By avoiding debt and saving money now, we are prepared for full-time Church service in the years to come. The purpose of both temporal and spiritual self-reliance is to get ourselves on higher ground so that we can lift others in need.

Whether we are young or old, what we do today determines the service we will be able to render and enjoy tomorrow. As the poet reminds us, "Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: 'It might have been!'"¹² Let us not live our lives in regret of what we did or did not do!

Beloved brothers and sisters, the young man spoken about by the Savior, the one we refer to as the prodigal son, *did come home*. His father had not forgotten him; his father was waiting. And "when [the son] was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and . . . kissed him."¹³ In honor of his

son's return, he called for a robe, a ring, and a celebration with a fatted calf¹⁴—reminders that no blessings will be withheld if we faithfully endure in walking the path back to our Heavenly Father.

With His love and the love of His Son in my heart, I challenge each of us to follow our spiritual desires and *come to ourselves*. Let's have a talk with ourselves in the mirror and ask, "Where do I stand on living my covenants?" We are on the right path when we can say, "I worthily partake of the sacrament each week, I am worthy to hold a temple recommend and go to the temple, and I sacrifice to serve and bless others."

I share my special witness that God so loves each one of us "that he gave his only begotten Son"¹⁵ to atone for our sins. He knows us and waits for us, even when we are a great way off. As we act on our desires and come to ourselves, we will be "encircled about eternally in the arms of his love"¹⁶ and welcomed home. I so testify in the holy name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Luke 15:17. | 10. Luke 22:32. |
| 2. Alma 32:27. | 11. Doctrine and Covenants 123:11. |
| 3. Mosiah 3:19. | 12. John Greenleaf Whittier, "Maud Muller," <i>The Complete Poetical Works of Whittier</i> (1894), 48. |
| 4. See Matthew 26:17–28; Luke 22:1–20. | 13. Luke 15:20. |
| 5. Alma 5:12; see also Mosiah 5:2; Alma 5:13–14. | 14. See Luke 15:22–24. |
| 6. Moroni 6:6. | 15. John 3:16. |
| 7. See Moroni 4:3; Doctrine and Covenants 20:77. | 16. 2 Nephi 1:15. |
| 8. Psalm 24:3–4. | |
| 9. Doctrine and Covenants 95:8. | |

Faith, Fortitude, Fulfillment: A Message to Single Parents

By Elder David S. Baxter
Of the Seventy

You are striving to raise your children in righteousness and truth, knowing that while you cannot change the past, you can shape the future.

My message is for the single parents in the Church, the majority of whom are single mothers—you valiant women who, through the varying circumstances of life, find yourselves raising children and running a home on your own. Perhaps you have been widowed or divorced. You may be coping with the challenges of single parenthood as a result of having taken a wrong turn outside of marriage, but you are now living within the framework of the gospel, having turned your life around. Bless you for avoiding the type of companionship that would come at the expense of virtue and discipleship. That would be far too high a price to pay.

Although you may at times have asked, why me? it is through the hardships of life that we grow toward godhood as our character is shaped in the crucible of affliction, as the events of life take place while God respects the agency of man. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell commented, we cannot do all the sums or make it all add up because “we do not have all the numbers.”¹

Whatever your circumstances or the reasons for them, how wonderful you are. Day to day you face the struggles of life, doing the work that was always meant for two but doing it largely alone. You have to be father as well as mother. You run

your household, watch over your family, sometimes struggle to make ends meet, and miraculously you even find the wherewithal to serve in the Church in significant ways. You nurture your children. You cry and pray with them and for them. You want the very best for them but fret every night that your best may never be good enough.

Whilst reluctant to be overly personal, I am the product of such a home. For most of my childhood and teenage years, my mother raised us on her own in poor circumstances. Money was carefully rationed. She coped with an inner loneliness, desperate at times for support and companionship. Yet despite all of this, there was a dignity about my mother, a tremendous source of determination and sheer Scottish grit.

Thankfully, her later years were more blessed than the beginning. She married a new convert, a widower; they were sealed in the London England Temple and later briefly served there as ordinance workers. They were together for almost a quarter of a century—happy, content, and fulfilled until overtaken by mortality.

There are many of you good women in the Church across the world who face similar circumstances and who demonstrate the same resilience year after year.

This is not exactly what you hoped or planned, prayed for or expected, when you started out years ago. Your journey through life has had bumps, detours, twists, and turns, mostly as the result of life in a fallen world that is meant to be a place of proving and testing.

Meanwhile, you are striving to raise your children in righteousness and truth, knowing that while you cannot change the past, you can shape the future. Along the way you will obtain compensatory blessings, even if they are not immediately apparent.

With God's help, you need not fear for the future. Your children will grow up and call you blessed, and every single one of their many achievements will stand as a tribute to you.

Please never feel that you are in some kind of second-tier subcategory of Church membership, somehow less entitled to the

Lord's blessings than others. In the kingdom of God there are no second-class citizens.

We hope that when you attend meetings and see seemingly complete and happy families or hear someone speak of family ideals, you will feel glad to be part of a church that does focus on families and teaches of their central role in Heavenly Father's plan for the happiness of His children; that in the midst of world calamity and moral decay, we have the doctrine, authority, ordinances, and covenants that do hold out the best hope for the world, including for the future happiness of your children and the families they will create.

In the general Relief Society meeting of September 2006, President Gordon B. Hinckley related an experience shared by a divorced single mother of seven children then ranging in ages from 7 to 16. She had gone across the street to deliver something to a neighbor. She said:

"As I turned around to walk back home, I could see my house lighted up. I could hear echoes of my children as I had walked out of the door a few minutes earlier. They were saying: 'Mom, what are we going to have for dinner?' 'Can you take me to the library?' 'I have to get some poster paper tonight.' Tired and weary, I looked at that house and saw the light on in each of the rooms. I thought of all of those children who were home waiting for me to come and meet their needs. My burdens felt heavier than I could bear.

"I remember looking through tears toward the sky, and I said, 'Dear Father, I just can't do it tonight. I'm too tired. I can't face it. I can't go home and take care of all those children alone. Could I just come to You and stay with You for just one night? . . .'

"I didn't really hear the words of reply, but I heard them in my mind. The answer was: 'No, little one, you can't come to me now. . . . But I can come to you.'"²

Thank you, sisters, for all that you are doing to raise your family and maintain a loving home where there is goodness, peace, and opportunity.

Although you often feel alone, in truth you are never *totally* on your own. As you move forward in patience and in faith,

Providence will move with you; heaven will bestow its needful blessings.

Your perspective and view of life will change when, rather than being cast down, you look up.

Many of you have already discovered the great, transforming truth that when you live to lift the burdens of others, your own burdens become lighter. Although circumstances may not have changed, your attitude has. You are able to face your own trials with greater acceptance, a more understanding heart, and deeper gratitude for what you have, rather than pining for what you yet lack.

You have discovered that when we extend lines of hopeful credit to those whose life accounts seem empty, our own coffers of consolation are enriched and made full; our cup truly “runneth over” (Psalm 23:5).

Through righteous living, you and your children may one day enjoy the blessings of being part of a complete, eternal family.

Members and leaders, is there more that you could do to support single-parent families without passing judgment or casting aspersions? Might you mentor young people in these families, especially providing for young men examples of what good men do and how good men live? In the absence of fathers, are you providing role models worthy of emulation?

Now, there are, of course, some single families where it is the father who is the single parent. Brethren, we also pray for you and pay tribute to you. This message is also for you.

Single parents, I testify that as you do your very best in the most difficult of human challenges, heaven will smile upon you. Truly you are not alone. Let the redemptive, loving power of Jesus Christ brighten your life now and fill you with the hope of eternal promise. Take courage. Have faith and hope. Consider the present with fortitude and look to the future with confidence. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Neal A. Maxwell, *Notwithstanding My Weakness* (1981), 68.

2. In Gordon B. Hinckley, “In the Arms of His Love,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 117.

Abide in the Lord's Territory!

By Elder Ulisses Soares

Of the Seventy

Our daily question must be, "Do my actions place me in the Lord's or in the enemy's territory?"

President Thomas S. Monson once said: "May I provide a simple formula by which you can measure the choices which confront you. It's easy to remember: 'You can't be right by doing wrong; you can't be wrong by doing right'" ("Pathways to Perfection," *Liahona*, July 2002, 112; *Ensign*, May 2002, 100). President Monson's formula is simple and direct. It works the same way as the Liahona given to Lehi did. If we exercise faith and are diligent in obeying the Lord's commandments, we will easily find the correct direction to follow, especially when we face our day-to-day choices.

The Apostle Paul exhorts us about the importance of sowing in the Spirit and being aware of not sowing in the flesh. He said:

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

"For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:7–9).

To sow in the Spirit means that all our thoughts, words, and actions must elevate us to the level of the divinity of our heavenly parents. However, the scriptures refer to the flesh as the physical or carnal nature of the natural man, which allows people to be influenced by passion, desires, appetites, and drives of the flesh

instead of looking for inspiration from the Holy Ghost. If we are not careful, those influences together with the pressure of the evil in the world may conduct us to adopt vulgar and reckless behavior which may become part of our character. In order to avoid those bad influences, we have to follow what the Lord instructed the Prophet Joseph Smith about continuously sowing in the Spirit: “Wherefore, be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great” (D&C 64:33).

To enhance our spirit, it is required that we “let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from [us], with all malice” (Ephesians 4:31) and that we “be wise in the days of [our] probation [and] strip [ourselves] of all uncleanness” (Mormon 9:28).

As we study the scriptures, we learn that the promises made by the Lord to us are conditional upon our obedience and encourage righteous living. Those promises must nourish our soul, bringing us hope by encouraging us not to give up even in the face of our daily challenges of living in a world whose ethical and moral values are becoming extinct, thus motivating people to sow in the flesh even more. But how can we be certain that our choices are helping us to sow in the Spirit and not in the flesh?

President George Albert Smith, repeating counsel from his grandfather, once said: “There is a line of demarcation well defined between the Lord’s territory and the devil’s territory. If you will stay on the Lord’s side of the line you will be under his influence and will have no desire to do wrong; but if you cross to the devil’s side of that line one inch you are in the tempter’s power and if he is successful, you will not be able to think or even reason properly because you will have lost the Spirit of the Lord” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: George Albert Smith* [2011], 191).

Therefore, our daily question must be, “Do my actions place me in the Lord’s or in the enemy’s territory?”

Mormon the prophet alerted his people about the importance of having the ability to distinguish good from evil:

“Wherefore, all things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil; for the devil is an enemy

unto God, and fighteth against him continually, and inviteth and enticeth to sin, and to do that which is evil continually.

“But behold, that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually” (Moroni 7:12–13).

The Light of Christ together with the companionship of the Holy Ghost must help us determine if our manner of living is placing us in the Lord’s territory or not. If our attitudes are good, they are inspired of God, for every good thing comes from God. However, if our attitudes are bad, we are being influenced by the enemy because he persuades men to do evil.

The African people have touched my heart because of their determination and diligence to stay in the Lord’s territory. Even in adverse circumstances in life, those who accept the invitation to come unto Christ become a light to the world. A few weeks ago while visiting one of the wards in South Africa, I had the privilege to accompany two young priests, their bishop, and their stake president in a visit to less-active young men of their quorum. I was greatly impressed by the courage and humility that those two priests showed as they invited the less-active young men to return to church. While they talked to those less-active young men, I noticed that their countenances reflected the Savior’s light and at the same time filled with light all those around them. They were fulfilling their duty to “succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees” (D&C 81:5). The attitude of those two priests placed them in the Lord’s territory, and they served as instruments in His hands as they invited others to do the same.

In Doctrine and Covenants 20:37, the Lord teaches us what it means to sow in the Spirit and what really places us in the Lord’s territory, as follows: humble ourselves before God, come forth with broken hearts and contrite spirits, witness before the Church that we have truly repented of all our sins, take upon ourselves the name of Jesus Christ, have a determination to serve Him to the end, manifest by our works that we have received the Spirit of Christ, and be received by baptism into His Church. Our disposition to fulfill these covenants prepares us to live in God’s presence as exalted beings. The remembrance of these covenants must guide our behavior in relation to our family, in our social

interaction with other people, and especially in our relationship with the Savior.

Jesus Christ established the perfect behavior pattern by which we can build upon our attitudes to be able to fulfill these sacred covenants. The Savior banished from His life any influence that might take His focus away from His divine mission, especially when He was tempted by the enemy or by his followers while He ministered here on earth. Although He never sinned, He had a broken heart and a contrite spirit, full of love for our Heavenly Father and for all men. He humbled Himself before our Father in Heaven, denying His own will to fulfill what the Father had asked of Him in all things until the end. Even at that moment of extreme physical and spiritual pain, carrying the burden of the sins of all mankind on His shoulders and shedding blood through His pores, He told the Father, "Nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mark 14:36).

My prayer, brothers and sisters, as we think about our covenants is that we may keep ourselves strong against "the fiery darts of the adversary" (1 Nephi 15:24), following the Savior's example so that we may sow in the Spirit and abide in the Lord's territory. Let us remember President Monson's formula: "You can't be right by doing wrong; you can't be wrong by doing right." I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

In Tune with the Music of Faith

By Elder Quentin L. Cook

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

God loves all His children. He wants all of them to return to Him. He desires everyone to be in tune with the sacred music of faith.

As the General Authorities of the Church meet with members all over the world, we see firsthand how Latter-day Saints are a force for good. We commend you for all you do to bless the lives of all people.

Those of us with public affairs assignments are acutely aware that many opinion leaders and journalists in the United States and around the world have increased their public discussion of the Church and its members. A unique confluence of factors has raised the Church's profile significantly.¹

Many who write about the Church have made a sincere effort to understand our people and our doctrine. They have been civil and have tried to be objective, for which we are grateful.

We also recognize that many individuals are not in tune with sacred things. Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks of England, speaking to Roman Catholic leaders last December at the Pontifical Gregorian University, noted how secular some parts of the world have become. He stated that one culprit is "an aggressive scientific atheism tone deaf to the music of faith."²

The great introductory vision in the Book of Mormon is Lehi's prophetic dream of the tree of life.³ This vision starkly describes the challenges to faith that exist in our day and the great divide between those who love, worship, and feel accountable to God and those who do not. Lehi explains some of

the conduct that destroys faith. Some are proud, vain, and foolish. They are interested only in the so-called wisdom of the world.⁴ Others have some interest in God but are lost in worldly mists of darkness and sin.⁵ Some have tasted of the love of God and His word but feel ashamed because of those mocking them and fall away into “forbidden paths.”⁶

Finally, there are those who are in tune with the music of faith. You know who you are. You love the Lord and His gospel and continuously try to live and share His message, especially with your families.⁷ You are in harmony with the promptings of the Spirit, have awakened to the power of God’s word, have religious observance in your homes, and diligently try to live Christlike lives as His disciples.

We recognize how busy you are. Without a paid professional ministry, the responsibility for administering the Church depends on you consecrated members. We know it is common for members of bishoprics and stake presidencies and many others to render long hours of devoted service. Auxiliary and quorum presidencies are exemplary in their selfless sacrifice. This service and sacrifice extend through the entire membership, to those keeping clerical records, faithful home and visiting teachers, and those teaching classes. We are grateful to those who courageously serve as Scoutmasters and nursery leaders as well. You all have our love and appreciation for what you do and who you are!

We acknowledge that there are members who are less interested in and less faithful to some of the Savior’s teachings. Our desire is for these members to awaken fully to faith and increase their activity and commitment. God loves all His children. He wants all of them to return to Him. He desires everyone to be in tune with the sacred music of faith. The Savior’s Atonement is a gift for everyone.

It needs to be taught and understood that we love and respect all of the people whom Lehi described.⁸ Remember, it is not up to us to judge. Judgment is the Lord’s.⁹ President Thomas S. Monson has specifically asked us to have the “courage to refrain from judging others.”¹⁰ He has also asked every faithful member to *rescue* those who have tasted of the gospel fruit and then have fallen away, as well as those who have not yet found the strait

and narrow path. We pray that they will hold to the rod and partake of the love of God, which will fill their “soul[s] with exceedingly great joy.”¹¹

While Lehi’s vision includes all people, the culminating doctrinal concept is the eternal significance of the family. “The family is ordained of God. It is the most important unit in time and in eternity.”¹² As Lehi partook of the fruit of the tree of life (the love of God), he was desirous that his “family should partake of it also.”¹³

Our great desire is to raise our children in truth and righteousness. One principle that will help us accomplish this is to avoid being overly judgmental about conduct that is foolish or unwise but not sinful. Many years ago, when my wife and I had children at home, Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught that it was important to distinguish between youthful mistakes which should be corrected and sins that require chastening and repentance.¹⁴ Where there is lack of wisdom, our children need instruction. Where there is sin, repentance is essential.¹⁵ We found this to be helpful in our own family.

Religious observance in the home blesses our families. Example is particularly important. What we *are* speaks so loudly that our children may not hear what we say. When I was nearly five years old, my mother received word that her younger brother had been killed when the battleship on which he was serving was bombed off the coast of Japan near the end of World War II.¹⁶ This news was devastating to her. She was very emotional and went into the bedroom. After a while I peeked into the room to see if she was OK. She was kneeling by the bed in prayer. A great peace came over me because she had taught me to pray and love the Savior. This was typical of the example she always set for me. Mothers and fathers praying with children may be more important than any other example.

The message, ministry, and Atonement of Jesus Christ, our Savior, are our essential family curriculum. No scripture characterizes our faith better than 2 Nephi 25:26: “And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our

children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins.”

One of the underlying premises of Lehi’s vision is that faithful members must hold fast to the rod of iron to keep them on the strait and narrow path leading to the tree of life. It is essential for members to read, ponder, and study the scriptures.¹⁷

The Book of Mormon is of seminal importance.¹⁸ There will, of course, always be those who underestimate the significance of or even disparage this sacred book. Some have used humor. Before I served a mission, a university professor quoted Mark Twain’s statement that if you took “And it came to pass” out of the Book of Mormon, it “would have been only a pamphlet.”¹⁹

A few months later, while I was serving a mission in London, England, a distinguished Oxford-educated teacher at London University, an Egyptian expert in Semitic languages, read the Book of Mormon, corresponded with President David O. McKay, and met with missionaries. He informed them he was convinced the Book of Mormon was indeed a translation of “the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians” for the periods described in the Book of Mormon.²⁰ One example among many he used was the conjunctive phrase “And it came to pass,” which he said mirrored how he would translate phraseology used in ancient Semitic writings.²¹ The professor was informed that while his intellectual approach based on his profession had helped him, it was still essential to have a spiritual testimony. Through study and prayer he gained a spiritual witness and was baptized. So what one famous humorist saw as an object of ridicule, a scholar recognized as profound evidence of the truth of the Book of Mormon, which was confirmed to him by the Spirit.

The essential doctrine of agency requires that a testimony of the restored gospel be based on faith rather than just external or scientific proof. Obsessive focus on things not yet fully revealed, such as how the virgin birth or the Resurrection of the Savior could have occurred or exactly how Joseph Smith translated our scriptures, will not be efficacious or yield spiritual progress. These are matters of faith. Ultimately, Moroni’s counsel to read and ponder and then ask God in all sincerity of heart, with real intent, to confirm scriptural truths by the witness of the Spirit is

the answer.²² In addition, when we inculcate into our lives scriptural imperatives and live the gospel, we are blessed with the Spirit and taste of His goodness with feelings of joy, happiness, and especially peace.²³

Clearly, a dividing line between those who hear the music of faith and those who are tone-deaf or off-key is the active study of the scriptures. I was deeply touched years ago that a beloved prophet, Spencer W. Kimball, emphasized the need to continually read and study the scriptures. He said: "I find that when I get casual in my relationships with divinity and when it seems that no divine ear is listening and no divine voice is speaking, that I am far, far away. If I immerse myself in the scriptures the distance narrows and the spirituality returns."²⁴

I hope we are reading the Book of Mormon with our children regularly. I have discussed this with my own children. They have shared with me two observations. First, persistence in reading the scriptures daily as a family is the key. My daughter in a lighthearted way describes their early-morning efforts with mostly teenage children to consistently read the scriptures. She and her husband wake up early in the morning and move through the blurry mist to grasp the iron railing that lines their staircase to where their family gathers to read the word of God. Persistence is the answer, and a sense of humor helps. It requires great effort from every family member every day, but it is worth the effort. Temporary setbacks are overshadowed by persistence.

The second is how our youngest son and his wife are reading the scriptures with their young family. Two out of their four children are not old enough to read. For the five-year-old, they have five finger signals to which he responds in order for him to participate fully in the family scripture reading. The signal for finger 1 is for him to repeat, "And it came to pass" whenever it appears in the Book of Mormon. I have to admit that I love the fact that the phrase appears so often. Incidentally, for the interest of young families, finger signal 2 is "And thus we see"; fingers 3, 4, and 5 are chosen by the parents based on the words contained in the chapter they are reading.

We know that family scripture study and family home evenings are not always perfect. Regardless of the challenges you face, do not become discouraged.

Please understand that having faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and keeping His commandments are and always will be the defining test of mortality. Above all else, each of us must realize that when one is tone-deaf to the music of faith, he or she is out of tune with the Spirit. As the prophet Nephi taught, “Ye have heard his voice . . . ; and he hath spoken unto you in a still small voice, but ye were past feeling, that ye could not feel his words.”²⁵

Our doctrine is clear; we are to be positive and of good cheer. We emphasize our faith, not our fears. We rejoice in the Lord’s assurance that He will stand by us and give us guidance and direction.²⁶ The Holy Ghost testifies to our hearts that we have a loving Father in Heaven, whose merciful plan for our redemption will be fulfilled in every aspect because of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

As Naomi W. Randall, author of “I Am a Child of God,” penned, “His Spirit guides; his love assures that fear departs when faith endures.”²⁷

Let us, therefore, wherever we are on the path of discipleship in Lehi’s vision, resolve to awaken within us and our families a greater desire to claim the Savior’s incomprehensible gift of eternal life. I pray that we will stay in tune with the music of faith. I testify of the divinity of Jesus Christ and the reality of His Atonement in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Doctrine and Covenants 1:30.
2. Jonathan Sacks, “Has Europe Lost Its Soul?” (address delivered on Dec. 12, 2011, at the Pontifical Gregorian University), chiefrabbi.org/ReadArtical.aspx?id=1843.
3. See 1 Nephi 8.
4. See 1 Nephi 8:27; 11:35.
5. See 1 Nephi 8:23; 12:17.
6. 1 Nephi 8:28.
7. See 1 Nephi 8:12.
8. The Savior’s instructions are to seek out the lost sheep; see Matthew 18:12–14.
9. See John 5:22; see also Matthew 7:1–2.
10. Thomas S. Monson, “May You Have Courage,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, May 2009, 124.
11. 1 Nephi 8:12.
12. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 1.1.1.
13. 1 Nephi 8:12.
14. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Sins and Mistakes,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1996, 62.

- Elder Oaks taught this idea when he was president of Brigham Young University in approximately 1980.
15. See Doctrine and Covenants 1:25–27.
 16. See Marva Jeanne Kimball Pedersen, *Vaughn Roberts Kimball: A Memorial* (1995). Vaughn played football as a quarterback for Brigham Young University in the fall of 1941. The day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, December 8, 1941, he enlisted in the US Navy. He was killed on May 11, 1945, by enemy bombing attacks against the USS *Bunker Hill* and was buried at sea.
 17. See John 5:39.
 18. See Ezra Taft Benson, “The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, 4; or *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Oct. 2011, 52.
 19. Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (1891), 127–28. Each new generation is presented with Twain’s comments as if they were a significant new discovery. There is usually little reference to the fact that Mark Twain was equally dismissive of Christianity and religion in general.
 20. 1 Nephi 1:2.
 21. I met Dr. Ebeid Sarofim in London when the elders were teaching him. See also N. Eldon Tanner, in Conference Report, Apr. 1962, 53. Many scholars of ancient Semitic and Egyptian writings have noted the repetitive use of the conjunctive phrase “And it came to pass” at the beginning of sentences; see Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 2nd ed. (1988), 150.
 22. See Moroni 10:3–4; very few critics have sincerely tested this with real intent.
 23. See Doctrine and Covenants 59:23.
 24. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (2006), 67.
 25. 1 Nephi 17:45; see also Ezra Taft Benson, “Seek the Spirit of the Lord,” *Tambuli*, Sept. 1988, 5; *Ensign*, Apr. 1988, 4: “We hear the words of the Lord most often by a feeling. If we are humble and sensitive, the Lord will prompt us through our feelings.”
 26. See Doctrine and Covenants 68:6.
 27. “When Faith Endures,” *Hymns*, no. 128.

How to Obtain Revelation and Inspiration for Your Personal Life

By Elder Richard G. Scott

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

*Why does the Lord want us to pray to Him and to ask?
Because that is how revelation is received.*

Anyone who stands at this pulpit to deliver a message feels the strength and support of members throughout the world. I'm grateful that that same support can come from a beloved companion on the other side of the veil. Thank you, Jeanene.

The Holy Ghost communicates important information that we need to guide us in our mortal journey. When it is crisp and clear and essential, it warrants the title of revelation. When it is a series of promptings we often have to guide us step by step to a worthy objective, for the purpose of this message, it is inspiration.

An example of revelation would be the direction that President Spencer W. Kimball received after his long and continued supplication to the Lord regarding providing the priesthood to all worthy men in the Church when at the time it was available to only some of them.

Another example of revelation is this guidance given to President Joseph F. Smith: "I believe we move and have our being in the presence of heavenly messengers and of heavenly beings. We are not separate from them. . . . We are closely related to our kindred, to our ancestors . . . who have preceded us into the spirit world. We can not forget them; we do not cease to love them; we always hold them in our hearts, in memory, and thus we are

associated and united to them by ties that we can not break. . . . If this is the case with us in our finite condition, surrounded by our mortal weaknesses, . . . how much more certain it is . . . to believe that those who have been faithful, who have gone beyond . . . can see us better than we can see them; that they know us better than we know them. . . . We live in their presence, they see us, they are solicitous for our welfare, they love us now more than ever. For now they see the dangers that beset us; . . . their love for us and their desire for our well being must be greater than that which we feel for ourselves.”¹

Relationships can be strengthened through the veil with people we know and love. That is done by our determined effort to continually do what is right. We can strengthen our relationship with the departed individual we love by recognizing that the separation is temporary and that covenants made in the temple are eternal. When consistently obeyed, such covenants assure the eternal realization of the promises inherent in them.

A very clear case of revelation in my life occurred when I was strongly prompted by the Spirit to ask Jeanene Watkins to be sealed to me in the temple.

One of the great lessons that each of us needs to learn is to ask. Why does the Lord want us to pray to Him and to ask? Because that is how revelation is received.

When I am faced with a very difficult matter, this is how I try to understand what to do. I fast. I pray to find and understand scriptures that will be helpful. That process is cyclical. I start reading a passage of scripture; I ponder what the verse means and pray for inspiration. I then ponder and pray to know if I have captured all the Lord wants me to do. Often more impressions come with increased understanding of doctrine. I have found that pattern to be a good way to learn from the scriptures.

There are some practical principles that enhance revelation. First, yielding to emotions such as anger or hurt or defensiveness will drive away the Holy Ghost. Those emotions must be eliminated, or our chance for receiving revelation is slight.

Another principle is to be cautious with humor. Loud, inappropriate laughter will offend the Spirit. A good sense of

humor helps revelation; loud laughter does not. A sense of humor is an escape valve for the pressures of life.

Another enemy to revelation comes from exaggeration or loudness in what is stated. Careful, quiet speech will favor the receipt of revelation.

On the other hand, spiritual communication can be enhanced by good health practices. Exercise, reasonable amounts of sleep, and good eating habits increase our capacity to receive and understand revelation. We will live for our appointed life span. However, we can improve both the quality of our service and our well-being by making careful, appropriate choices.

It is important that our daily activities do not distract us from listening to the Spirit.

Revelation can also be given in a dream when there is an almost imperceptible transition from sleep to wakefulness. If you strive to capture the content immediately, you can record great detail, but otherwise it fades rapidly. Inspired communication in the night is generally accompanied by a sacred feeling for the entire experience. The Lord uses individuals for whom we have great respect to teach us truths in a dream because we trust them and will listen to their counsel. It is the Lord doing the teaching through the Holy Ghost. However, He may in a dream make it both easier to understand and more likely to touch our hearts by teaching us through someone we love and respect.

When it is for the Lord's purposes, He can bring anything to our remembrance. That should not weaken our determination to record impressions of the Spirit. Inspiration carefully recorded shows God that His communications are sacred to us. Recording will also enhance our ability to recall revelation. Such recording of direction of the Spirit should be protected from loss or intrusion by others.

The scriptures give eloquent confirmation of how truth, consistently lived, opens the door to inspiration to know what to do and, where needed, to have personal capacities enhanced by divine power. The scriptures depict how an individual's capacity to conquer difficulty, doubt, and seemingly insurmountable challenges is strengthened by the Lord in time of need. As you ponder such examples, there will come a quiet confirmation

through the Holy Spirit that their experiences are true. You will come to know that similar help is available to you.

I have seen individuals encountering challenges who knew what to do when it was beyond their own experience because they trusted in the Lord and knew that He would guide them to solutions that were urgently required.

The Lord has declared: “And ye are to be taught from on high. Sanctify yourselves and ye shall be endowed with power, that ye may give even as I have spoken.”² The words *sanctify yourselves* may appear puzzling. President Harold B. Lee once explained that you can replace those words with the phrase “keep my commandments.” Read that way, the counsel may seem clearer.³

One must be ever mentally and physically clean and have purity of intent so that the Lord can inspire. One who is obedient to His commandments is trusted of the Lord. That individual has access to His inspiration to know what to do and, as needed, the divine power to do it.

For spirituality to grow stronger and more available, it must be planted in a righteous environment. Haughtiness, pride, and conceit are like stony ground that will never produce spiritual fruit.

Humility is a fertile soil where spirituality grows and produces the fruit of inspiration to know what to do. It gives access to divine power to accomplish what must be done. An individual motivated by a desire for praise or recognition will not qualify to be taught by the Spirit. An individual who is arrogant or who lets his or her emotions influence decisions will not be powerfully led by the Spirit.

When we are acting as instruments in behalf of others, we are more easily inspired than when we think only of ourselves. In the process of helping others, the Lord can piggyback directions for our own benefit.

Our Heavenly Father did not put us on earth to fail but to succeed gloriously. It may seem paradoxical, but that is why recognizing answers to prayer can sometimes be very difficult. Sometimes we unwisely try to face life by depending on our own experience and capacity. It is much wiser for us to seek through

prayer and divine inspiration to know what to do. Our obedience assures that when required, we can qualify for divine power to accomplish an inspired objective.

Like many of us, Oliver Cowdery did not recognize the evidence of answers to prayers already given by the Lord. To open his and our eyes, this revelation was given through Joseph Smith:

“Blessed art thou for what thou hast done; for thou hast inquired of me, and behold, as often as thou hast inquired thou hast received instruction of my Spirit. If it had not been so, thou wouldst not have come to the place where thou art at this time.

“Behold, thou knowest that thou hast inquired of me and I did enlighten thy mind; and now I tell thee these things that thou mayest know that thou hast been enlightened by the Spirit of truth.”⁴

If you feel that God has not answered your prayers, ponder these scriptures—then carefully look for evidence in your own life that He may have already answered you.

Two indicators that a feeling or prompting comes from God are that it produces peace in your heart and a quiet, warm feeling. As you follow the principles I have discussed, you will be prepared to recognize revelation at critical times in your own life.

The more closely you follow divine guidance, the greater will be your happiness here and for eternity—moreover, the more abundant your progress and capacity to serve. I do not understand fully how it is done, but that guidance in your life does not take away your agency. You can make the decisions you choose to make. But remember, the disposition to do right brings peace of mind and happiness.

Should choices be wrong, they can be rectified through repentance. When its conditions are fully met, the Atonement of Jesus Christ, our Savior, provides a release from the demands of justice for the errors made. It is wondrously simple and so incomparably beautiful. As you continue to live righteously, you will always be prompted to know what to do. Sometimes the discovery of what action to take may require significant effort and trust on your part. Yet you will be prompted to know what to do as you meet the conditions for such divine guidance in your

life, namely, obedience to the commandments of the Lord, trust in His divine plan of happiness, and the avoidance of anything that is contrary to it.

Communication with our Father in Heaven is not a trivial matter. It is a sacred privilege. It is based upon eternal, unchanging principles. We receive help from our Father in Heaven in response to our faith, obedience, and the proper use of agency.

May the Lord inspire you to understand and use the principles that lead to personal revelation and inspiration, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Joseph F. Smith, in Conference Report, Apr. 1916, 2–3; see also *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (1939), 430–31.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 43:16.
3. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee* (2000), 34.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 6:14–15.

The Powers of Heaven

By Elder David A. Bednar

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Priesthood holders young and old need both authority and power—the necessary permission and the spiritual capacity to represent God in the work of salvation.

My beloved brethren, I am grateful we can worship together as a vast body of priesthood holders. I love and admire you for your worthiness and your influence for good throughout the world.

I invite each of you to consider how you would respond to the following question posed to the members of the Church many years ago by President David O. McKay: “If at this moment each one of you were asked to state in one sentence or phrase the most distinguishing feature of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, what would be your answer?” (“The Mission of the Church and Its Members,” *Improvement Era*, Nov. 1956, 781).

The response President McKay gave to his own question was the “divine authority” of the priesthood. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints stands apart from other churches that claim their authority is derived from historical succession, the scriptures, or theological training. We make the distinctive declaration that priesthood authority has been conferred by the laying on of hands directly from heavenly messengers to the Prophet Joseph Smith.

My message focuses upon this divine priesthood and the powers of heaven. I earnestly pray for the assistance of the Spirit of the Lord as together we learn about these important truths.

Priesthood Authority and Power

The priesthood is the authority of God delegated to men on the earth to act in all things for the salvation of mankind (see Spencer W. Kimball, “The Example of Abraham,” *Ensign*, June 1975, 3). Priesthood is the means whereby the Lord acts through men to save souls. One of the defining features of the Church of Jesus Christ, both anciently and today, is His authority. There can be no true Church without divine authority.

Ordinary men are given the authority of the priesthood. Worthiness and willingness—not experience, expertise, or education—are the qualifications for priesthood ordination.

The pattern for obtaining priesthood authority is described in the fifth article of faith: “We believe that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof.” Thus, a boy or a man receives the authority of the priesthood and is ordained to a specific office by one who already holds the priesthood and has been authorized by a leader with the necessary priesthood keys.

A priesthood holder is expected to exercise this sacred authority in accordance with God’s holy mind, will, and purposes. Nothing about the priesthood is self-centered. The priesthood always is used to serve, to bless, and to strengthen other people.

The higher priesthood is received by a solemn covenant that includes the obligation to act in the authority (see D&C 68:8) and the office (see D&C 107:99) that have been received. As bearers of God’s holy authority, we are agents to act and not objects to be acted upon (see 2 Nephi 2:26). The priesthood is inherently active rather than passive.

President Ezra Taft Benson taught:

“It is not enough to receive the priesthood and then sit back passively and wait until someone prods us into activity. When we receive the priesthood, we have the obligation of becoming actively and anxiously engaged in promoting the cause of righteousness in the earth, because the Lord says:

“... He that doeth not anything until he is commanded, and receiveth a commandment with doubtful heart, and keepeth it

with slothfulness, the same is damned' [D&C 58:29]" (*So Shall Ye Reap* [1960], 21).

President Spencer W. Kimball also pointedly emphasized the active nature of the priesthood: "One breaks the priesthood covenant by transgressing commandments—but also by leaving undone his duties. Accordingly, *to break this covenant one needs only to do nothing*" (*The Miracle of Forgiveness* [1969], 96).

As we do our best to fulfill our priesthood responsibilities, we can be blessed with priesthood power. The power of the priesthood is God's power operating through men and boys like us and requires personal righteousness, faithfulness, obedience, and diligence. A boy or a man may receive priesthood authority by the laying on of hands but will have no priesthood power if he is disobedient, unworthy, or unwilling to serve.

"The rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and . . . the *powers* of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness.

"That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man" (D&C 121:36–37; emphasis added).

Brethren, for a boy or a man to receive priesthood authority but neglect to do what is necessary to qualify for priesthood power is unacceptable to the Lord. Priesthood holders young and old need both authority and power—the necessary permission and the spiritual capacity to represent God in the work of salvation.

A Lesson from My Father

I was reared in a home with a faithful mother and a wonderful father. My mom was a descendant of pioneers who sacrificed everything for the Church and kingdom of God. My dad was not a member of our Church and, as a young man, had desired to become a Catholic priest. Ultimately, he elected not to

attend theological seminary and instead pursued a career as a tool and die maker.

For much of his married life, my father attended meetings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with our family. In fact, many of the people in our ward had no idea that my dad was not a member of the Church. He played on and coached our ward softball team, helped with Scout activities, and supported my mother in her various callings and responsibilities. I want to tell you about one of the great lessons I learned from my father about priesthood authority and power.

As a boy I asked my dad many times each week when he was going to be baptized. He responded lovingly but firmly each time I pestered him: "David, I am not going to join the Church for your mother, for you, or for anyone else. I will join the Church when I know it is the right thing to do."

I believe I was in my early teenage years when the following conversation occurred with my father. We had just returned home from attending our Sunday meetings together, and I asked my dad when he was going to be baptized. He smiled and said, "You are the one always asking me about being baptized. Today I have a question for you." I quickly and excitedly concluded that now we were making progress!

My dad continued, "David, your church teaches that the priesthood was taken from the earth anciently and has been restored by heavenly messengers to the Prophet Joseph Smith, right?" I replied that his statement was correct. Then he said, "Here is my question. Each week in priesthood meeting I listen to the bishop and the other priesthood leaders remind, beg, and plead with the men to do their home teaching and to perform their priesthood duties. If your church truly has the restored priesthood of God, why are so many of the men in your church no different about doing their religious duty than the men in my church?" My young mind immediately went completely blank. I had no adequate answer for my dad.

I believe my father was wrong to judge the validity of our Church's claim to divine authority by the shortcomings of the men with whom he associated in our ward. But embedded in his question to me was a correct assumption that men who bear

God's holy priesthood should be different from other men. Men who hold the priesthood are not inherently better than other men, but they should act differently. Men who hold the priesthood should not only receive priesthood authority but also become worthy and faithful conduits of God's power. "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord" (D&C 38:42).

I have never forgotten the lessons about priesthood authority and power I learned from my father, a good man not of our faith, who expected more from men who claimed to bear God's priesthood. That Sunday afternoon conversation with my dad many years ago produced in me a desire to be a "good boy." I did not want to be a poor example and a stumbling block to my father's progress in learning about the restored gospel. I simply wanted to be a good boy. The Lord needs all of us as bearers of His authority to be honorable, virtuous, and good boys at all times and in all places.

You may be interested to know that a number of years later, my father was baptized. And at the appropriate times, I had the opportunity to confer upon him the Aaronic and the Melchizedek Priesthoods. One of the great experiences of my life was observing my dad receive the authority and, ultimately, the power of the priesthood.

I share with you this pointed lesson I learned from my father to emphasize a simple truth. Receiving the authority of the priesthood by the laying on of hands is an important beginning, but it is not enough. Ordination confers authority, but righteousness is required to act with power as we strive to lift souls, to teach and testify, to bless and counsel, and to advance the work of salvation.

In this momentous season of the earth's history, you and I as bearers of the priesthood need to be righteous men and effective instruments in the hands of God. We need to rise up as men of God. You and I would do well to learn from and heed the example of Nephi, the grandson of Helaman and the first of the twelve disciples called by the Savior at the beginning of His ministry among the Nephites. "And [Nephi] did minister many things unto them. . . . And Nephi did minister with power and with great authority" (3 Nephi 7:17).

“Please Help My Husband Understand”

At the conclusion of the temple recommend interviews I conducted as a bishop and stake president, I often would ask the married sisters how I could best serve them and their families. The consistency of the answers I received from those faithful women was both instructive and alarming. The sisters rarely complained or criticized, but they often responded as follows: “Please help my husband understand his responsibility as a priesthood leader in our home. I am happy to take the lead in scripture study, family prayer, and family home evening, and I will continue to do so. But I wish my husband would be an equal partner and provide the strong priesthood leadership only he can give. Please help my husband learn how to become a patriarch and a priesthood leader in our home who presides and protects.”

I reflect often on the sincerity of those sisters and their request. Priesthood leaders hear similar concerns today. Many wives are pleading for husbands who have not only priesthood authority but also priesthood power. They yearn to be equally yoked with a faithful husband and priesthood companion in the work of creating a Christ-centered and gospel-focused home.

Brethren, I promise that if you and I will prayerfully ponder the pleas of these sisters, the Holy Ghost will help us to see ourselves as we really are (see D&C 93:24) and help us recognize the things we need to change and improve. And the time to act is now!

Be Examples of Righteousness

Tonight I reiterate the teachings of President Thomas S. Monson, who has invited us as priesthood holders to be “examples of righteousness.” He has reminded us repeatedly that we are on the Lord’s errand and are entitled to His help predicated upon our worthiness (see “Examples of Righteousness,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, May 2008, 65–68). You and I hold priesthood authority that has been returned to the earth in this dispensation by heavenly messengers, even John the Baptist and Peter, James, and John. And therefore every man who receives the Melchizedek Priesthood can trace his personal line of authority directly to the Lord Jesus Christ. I hope we are grateful

for this marvelous blessing. I pray we will be clean and worthy to represent the Lord as we exercise His sacred authority. May each of us qualify for priesthood power.

I testify the holy priesthood indeed has been restored to the earth in these latter days and is found in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I also witness that President Thomas S. Monson is the presiding high priest over the high priesthood of the Church (see D&C 107:9, 22, 65–66, 91–92) and the only person upon the earth who both holds and is authorized to exercise all priesthood keys. Of these truths I solemnly testify in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

The Rescue for Real Growth

By Bishop Richard C. Edgley

Recently Released First Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric

Saving souls is the work the Savior has called all of us to do.

In recent months increased emphasis has been placed on establishing “real growth” in the Church, bringing all who will to the receiving and keeping of covenants and saving ordinances and living with a mighty change of heart as described by Alma (see Alma 5:14). One of the most meaningful and important ways to establish real growth in the Church is to reach out and rescue those who have been baptized yet are wandering in a less-active state, void of the blessings and saving ordinances. Regardless of our individual calling—home or visiting teacher, Sunday School teacher, bishop, father, mother, or General Authority—all can engage in the rescuing effort in a meaningful way. After all, bringing all—our family, nonmembers, less active, sinners—to Christ to receive the saving ordinances is the divine calling that we all share.

One Sunday morning some 30 years ago, while I was serving in a stake presidency, we received a telephone call from one of our faithful bishops. He explained that his ward had grown so rapidly that he could no longer provide a meaningful calling to all worthy members. His plea to us was that we divide the ward. While waiting for such approval, we decided as a stake presidency that we would visit the ward and call all these wonderful, worthy brothers and sisters to be stake missionaries.

About the third person I visited was a young female student attending the local university. After chatting for a few moments, I

issued the call to serve as a missionary. There was silence for a few moments. Then she said, "President, don't you know that I am not active in the Church?"

After a few moments of silence on my part, I said, "No, I did not know you were not active."

She answered, "I have not been active in the Church for years." Then she said, "Don't you know that when you have been inactive, it's not all that easy to come back?"

I responded, "No. Your ward starts at 9:00 a.m. You come into the chapel, and you are with us."

She answered, "No, it is not that easy. You worry about a lot of things. You worry if someone will greet you or if you will sit alone and unnoticed during the meetings. And you worry about whether you will be accepted and who your new friends will be."

With tears rolling down her cheeks, she continued, "I know that my mother and father have been praying for me for years to bring me back into the Church." Then after a moment of silence, she said, "For the last three months I have been praying to find the courage, the strength, and the way to come back into activity." Then she asked, "President, do you suppose this calling could be an answer to those prayers?"

My eyes started to water as I responded, "I believe the Lord has answered your prayers."

She not only accepted the call; she became a fine missionary. And I'm certain she brought much joy not only to herself but also to her parents and probably other family members.

There were several things I learned or was reminded of with this and similar interviews:

- I learned that many less-active members have loved ones on their knees daily petitioning the Lord for help in rescuing their loved one.
- I learned that it is not all that easy or comfortable for a less-active member to just walk back into the Church. They need help. They need support. They need fellowship.
- I learned we have less-active members who are trying and willing to find the path back to activity.

- I learned that many less-active members will hold callings if asked.
- I learned that a less-active member deserves to be treated as an equal and be viewed as a son or daughter of a loving God.

Over the years I have wondered how this interview might have gone had I approached her as a less-active Church member. I leave you to be the judge.

Reactivation has always been an important part of the work of the Lord. While the rescue is a responsibility of every member, holders of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthood have the responsibility to lead out in this work. After all, that is what priesthood service is all about—bringing all people to the exalting covenants; bringing peace, happiness, and self-worth.

From the Book of Mormon you will recall when Alma the Younger discovered that the Zoramites had fallen away from the Church, he organized a reactivation team to rescue these people. As they approached their assignment, Alma pleaded with the Lord with these words:

“O Lord, wilt thou grant unto us that we may have success in bringing them *again* unto thee in Christ.

“Behold, O Lord, their souls are precious, and *many of them are our brethren*; therefore, give unto us, O Lord, power and wisdom that we may bring these, our brethren, again unto thee” (Alma 31:34–35; emphasis added).

A few months ago after a meeting with new converts and less-active members, a reactivated gentleman about my age came up to me and said, “I am one who has been less active most of my life. I fell away from the Church early in my life. But I am back now, and I work in the temple with my wife.”

To let him know that everything was OK, my response was something like this: “All is well that ends well.”

He responded, “No, all is not well. I am back in the Church, but I have lost all of my children and my grandchildren. And I am now witnessing the loss of my great-grandchildren—all out of the Church. All is not well.”

In our family we have an ancestor who joined the Church in Europe in the early days of the Church. One son became inactive.

Sister Edgley and I have attempted to track the inactive descendants of this ancestor.

It was easy for my wife and me to conclude that during the following six generations and with reasonable assumptions, there could be a loss of up to 3,000 family members. Now project two more generations. The loss could theoretically approach 20,000 to 30,000 of our Heavenly Father's children.

The charge to rescue is based on one of the most fundamental doctrines of the Church.

"Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God;

"For, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of *all men*, that *all men might repent and come unto him*. . . .

"And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father!" (D&C 18:10–11, 15; emphasis added).

I have had the privilege of rescuing a few less-active members over my lifetime. Now when I help bring one back to Church activity, I don't visualize a single soul; I see six, seven, or more generations—thousands of souls. And then I think of the scripture: "Bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy" (D&C 18:15).

To His Apostles, the Lord said, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few" (Matthew 9:37). The laborers need not be few. We have thousands of capable, worthy priesthood holders and millions of committed members of the Church in all parts of the world. We have functioning ward councils, priesthood quorums, Relief Societies, and other organizations all with the charge to rescue. Saving souls is the work the Savior has called all of us to do.

Earlier in my remarks I referred to the prayer Alma offered as he and his companions embarked on the rescue of the Zoramites. During World War II approximately 500 U.S. soldiers and supporting locals were held captive in a prison camp. Because of the suffering and concern for their safety, a volunteer force of approximately 100 U.S. soldiers was selected to rescue these prisoners. After the volunteers were assembled, the commanding

officer instructed them something like this: “This evening you men meet with your religious leaders, you kneel down, and you swear to God that as long as you have a single breath of life, you will not let one of these men suffer one more moment.” (See Hampton Sides, *Ghost Soldiers: The Forgotten Epic Story of World War II’s Most Dramatic Mission* [2001], 28–29.) This successful rescue was a rescue from physical and temporal suffering. Should we be less valiant in our efforts to rescue those who could suffer spiritual and eternal consequences? Should we make less of a commitment to the Lord?

In conclusion, our commitment as members of Christ’s true Church stems from the fact that the Lord suffered for every single one of us—the nonmember, the less-active member, even the sinner, and every member in our own family. I believe we can bring thousands to the joy, peace, and sweetness of the gospel, and hundreds of thousands, even millions, in their following generations. I believe we can succeed because this is the Lord’s Church, and by virtue of our priesthood and our membership, we are called to succeed. I bear that witness to you in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Aaronic Priesthood: Arise and Use the Power of God

By **Adrián Ochoa**

Second Counselor in the Young Men General Presidency

The priesthood needs to be exercised to accomplish any good. You are called to “arise and shine forth,” not to hide your light in darkness.

Not long ago I was in South Africa visiting a home with Thabiso, the first assistant in the priests quorum in the Kagiso Ward. Thabiso and his bishop, who presides and holds the keys for the quorum, had been praying for quorum members who were less active, seeking inspiration about whom to visit and how to help them. They felt prompted to visit the home of Tebello, and they invited me to go with them.

Once we made it past the ferocious guard dog, we found ourselves in the living room with Tebello, a calm-spirited young man who had stopped attending church because he had become busy doing other things on Sundays. He was nervous but happy to receive us and even invited his family to join him. The bishop expressed his love for the family and his desire to help them become an eternal family by being sealed in the temple. Their hearts were moved, and we could all feel the strong presence of the Holy Ghost guiding every word and every sentiment.

But it was the words of Thabiso that made the difference in the visit. It seemed to me that this young priest was speaking in the language of angels—loving words that we all could fully understand but that especially touched his friend. “I enjoyed so much talking to you all the time at church,” he said. “You always have kind words for me. And you know, our soccer team has

basically disappeared now that we don't have you. You are so good at it."

"I am sorry," Tebello answered. "I will come back with you guys."

"That will be awesome," said Thabiso. "And do you remember how we used to prepare to serve as missionaries? Can we start doing that again?"

"Yes," repeated Tebello, "I want to come back."

Perhaps the greatest joy I experience as a counselor in the Young Men general presidency is seeing the Aaronic Priesthood holders around the world exercising the power of the Aaronic Priesthood. But sometimes I also witness, with a sad heart, how many young men do not understand how much good they can do with the power they hold.

The priesthood is the power and authority of God Himself to act in the service of His children. Oh, if only every young man, every Aaronic Priesthood holder, could fully comprehend that his priesthood possesses the keys of the ministering of angels. If only they could understand that they have the sacred duty to help their friends find the pathway that leads to the Savior. If only they knew that Heavenly Father will give them the power to explain the truths of the restored gospel with such clarity and sincerity that others will feel the undeniable truthfulness of the words of Christ.

Dear young men of the Church, let me ask you a question that I hope you will carry in your heart for the rest of your life. What greater power can you acquire on earth than the priesthood of God? What power could possibly be greater than the capacity to assist our Heavenly Father in changing the lives of your fellowmen, to help them along the pathway of eternal happiness by being cleansed of sin and wrongdoing?

Like any other power, the priesthood needs to be exercised to accomplish any good. You are called to "arise and shine forth" (D&C 115:5), not to hide your light in darkness. Only those who are brave will be counted among the chosen. As you exercise the power of your sacred priesthood, your courage and confidence will increase. Young men, you know that you are at your best when you are in the service of God. You know that you are

happiest when you are anxiously engaged in a good work. Magnify the power of your priesthood by being clean and being worthy.

I add my voice to the call Elder Jeffrey R. Holland made to you six months ago from this pulpit. “I am looking,” he said, “for men young and old who care enough about this battle between good and evil to sign on and speak up. We are at war.” He continued, “. . . I ask for a stronger and more devoted voice, a voice not only against evil . . . , but a voice for good, a voice for the gospel, a voice for God” (“We Are All Enlisted,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 44, 47).

Yes, Aaronic Priesthood holders, we are at war. And in this war, the best way to defend against evil is to actively promote righteousness. You cannot listen to foul words and pretend you don’t hear. You cannot watch, alone or with others, images you know are filthy and pretend you don’t see. You cannot touch any unclean thing and pretend it’s no big deal. You cannot be passive when Satan seeks to destroy that which is wholesome and pure. Instead, stand up boldly for what you know is true! When you hear or see anything that violates the Lord’s standards, remember who you are—a soldier in the army of God Himself, empowered with His holy priesthood. There is no better weapon against the enemy, the father of lies, than the truth that will come out of your mouth as you exercise the power of the priesthood. Most of your peers will respect you for your courage and your integrity. Some will not. But that doesn’t matter. You will gain the respect and trust of Heavenly Father because you used His power to accomplish His purposes.

I call on every Aaronic Priesthood quorum presidency to once again raise the title of liberty and organize and lead your battalions. Utilize your priesthood power by inviting those around you to come unto Christ through repentance and baptism. You have the mandate and power of Heavenly Father to do it.

Two years ago, while visiting Santiago, Chile, I was very much impressed by Daniel Olate, a young man who often accompanied the missionaries. I asked him to write to me, and with his permission I will read to you part of his recent e-mail: “I

just turned 16, and Sunday I was ordained to the office of a priest. That same day I baptized a friend; her name is Carolina. I taught her the gospel, and she regularly attended church and even received her Personal Progress award, but her parents would not allow her to be baptized until they got to know and trust me. She wanted me to baptize her, so we had to wait for a month until Sunday, when I turned 16. I feel so good to have helped such a good person to be baptized, and I feel happy that I was the one who baptized her.”

Daniel is just one of many young men around the world who are living up to the power God has entrusted to them. Another is Luis Fernando, from Honduras, who noticed that his friend was walking a dangerous path and shared his testimony with him, literally saving his life (see “A Change of Heart,” [lds.org/youth/video](https://www.lds.org/youth/video)). Olavo, from Brazil, is another example. A true standing minister in his home (see D&C 84:111), Olavo inspired his mother to return to full activity in the Church (see “Reunited by Faith,” [lds.org/youth/video](https://www.lds.org/youth/video)). You can find some of these stories and many others like them on the Church’s youth website, [youth.lds.org](https://www.youth.lds.org). By the way, the Internet, social media, and other technologies are tools the Lord has placed in your hands to help you exercise your priesthood duties and extend the influence of truth and virtue.

Dear young men, when you exercise the Aaronic Priesthood in the way I have described, you are preparing yourselves for responsibilities in your future. But you are doing much more than that. Like John the Baptist, that exemplary Aaronic Priesthood holder, you are also preparing the way of the Lord and making His paths straight. When you boldly declare the gospel of repentance and baptism, as John did, you are preparing the people for the coming of the Lord (see Matthew 3:3; D&C 65:1–3; 84:26–28). You are often told about your great potential. Well, now is the time to put that potential into action, to make use of the abilities God has given you to bless others, bring them out from obscurity and into light, and prepare the way of the Lord.

The Church has given you the Duty to God booklet as a resource to help you learn and fulfill your duties. Study it often. Get on your knees, away from technology, and seek the Lord’s

guidance. And then arise and use the power of God. I promise that you will receive answers from Heavenly Father on how to conduct your own life and how to help others.

I quote the words of President Thomas S. Monson: “Never underestimate the far-reaching influence of your testimony. . . . You have the capacity to notice the unnoticed. When you have eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to feel, you can reach out and rescue others” (“Be Thou an Example,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, May 2005, 115).

I testify to you that the power of the priesthood is real. I gained my witness exercising the priesthood myself. I have seen miracle after miracle performed by those who have the power of the Aaronic Priesthood. I have witnessed the power of the ministering of angels as faithful Aaronic Priesthood holders speak Spirit-filled words of hope, opening the heart of someone in need of light and love. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, our leader, and our Savior, amen.

The *Why* of Priesthood Service

By President Dieter F. Uchtdorf
Second Counselor in the First Presidency

Understanding the why of the gospel and the why of the priesthood will help us to see the divine purpose of all of this.

I cherish this wonderful opportunity to meet with the brethren of the priesthood and rejoice with you in the wonder and beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I commend you for your faith, your good works, and your abiding righteousness.

We share a common bond in that we have all received the ordination to the priesthood of God from those trusted with holy priesthood authority and power. This is no small blessing. It is a sacred responsibility.

The Power of *Why*

Recently I have been thinking about two significant callings I received as a priesthood holder in the Church.

The first of these callings came when I was a deacon. I attended with my family the branch of the Church in Frankfurt, Germany. We were blessed with many wonderful people in our little branch. One was our branch president, Brother Landschulz. I admired him a great deal, even though he always seemed to be rather serious, very official, and most of the time dressed in a dark suit. I remember as a young man joking with my friends how old-fashioned our branch president appeared.

It makes me laugh to think about this now because it is very possible that the youth of the Church today view me in a very similar way.

One Sunday, President Landschulz asked if he could speak with me. My first thought was, “What did I do wrong?” My mind raced over the many things I might have done that could have inspired this branch-president-to-deacon talk.

President Landschulz invited me into a small classroom—our chapel did not have an office for the branch president—and there he extended a call to me to serve as deacons quorum president.

“This is an important position,” he said, and then he took his time and described why. He explained what he and the Lord expected of me and how I could receive help.

I don’t remember much of what he said, but I do remember well how I felt. A sacred, divine Spirit filled my heart as he spoke. I could feel that this was the Savior’s Church. And I felt that the calling he had extended was inspired by the Holy Ghost. I remember walking out of that tiny classroom feeling quite a bit taller than before.

It has been nearly 60 years since that day, and I still treasure these feelings of trust and love.

As I was thinking back on this experience, I tried to remember just how many deacons there were in our branch at the time. To my best recollection, I believe there were two. However, this may be a huge exaggeration.

But it really didn’t matter whether there was one deacon or a dozen. I felt honored, and I wanted to serve to the best of my ability and not disappoint either my branch president or the Lord.

I realize now that the branch president could have merely gone through the motions when he called me to this position. He could have simply told me in the hallway or during our priesthood meeting that I was the new deacons quorum president.

Instead, he spent time with me and helped me understand not only the *what* of my assignment and new responsibility but, much more important, the *why*.

That is something I will never forget.

The point of this story is not merely to describe how to extend callings in the Church (although this was a wonderful lesson on the proper way to do it). It is an example to me of the

motivating power of priesthood leadership that awakens the spirit and inspires action.

We need to be constantly reminded of the eternal reasons behind the things we are commanded to do. The basic gospel principles need to be part of our life's fabric, even if it means learning them over and over again. That doesn't mean that this process should be rote or boring. Rather, when we teach the foundational principles in our homes or in church, let the flame of enthusiasm for the gospel and the fire of testimony bring light, warmth, and joy to the hearts of those we teach.

From the newest ordained deacon to the most senior high priest, we all have lists of *what* we could and should do in our priesthood responsibilities. The *what* is important in our work, and we need to attend to it. But it is in the *why* of priesthood service that we discover the fire, passion, and power of the priesthood.

The *what* of priesthood service teaches us what to do. The *why* inspires our souls.

The *what* informs, but the *why* transforms.

An Abundance of "Good" Things to Do

Another priesthood calling that I have been thinking about came to me many years later, when I had my own family. We had moved back to Frankfurt, Germany, and I had just received a promotion at work that would require a great deal of my time and attention. During this busy season of my life, Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin extended a call to me to serve as stake president.

During my interview with him, many thoughts raced through my mind, not the least of which was the unsettling worry that I might not have the time this calling would require. Although I felt humbled and honored by the call, I briefly wondered if I could accept it. But it was only a fleeting thought because I knew that Elder Wirthlin was called of God and that he was doing the Lord's work. What could I do but accept?

There are times when we have to step into the darkness in faith, confident that God will place solid ground beneath our feet once we do. And so I accepted gladly, knowing that God would provide.

In the early days of this assignment, we were privileged as a stake to receive training from some of the greatest teachers and leaders in the Church—men like Elder Russell M. Nelson and President Thomas S. Monson came to our area. Their teaching was like the dew from heaven and an inspiration for us. I still have the notes I took during these training sessions. These Brethren gave us the *vision* of what it means to establish the kingdom of God by building personal testimonies and strengthening families. They helped us see how to apply gospel truth and principles to our specific circumstances and for our specific time. To put it another way, inspired leaders helped us to see the *why* of the gospel, and then we had to roll up our sleeves and go to work.

It wasn't long before we realized that there were a lot of things a stake presidency could do—so many, in fact, that if we didn't set inspired priorities, we might miss doing the important ones. Competing priorities began to arise, deflecting our focus from the vision shared by the Brethren. There were many “good” things to do, but not all of them mattered most.

We learned an important lesson: the fact that something is good is not always reason enough to require our time and resources. Our activities, initiatives, and plans should be inspired by and grounded upon the *why* of our priesthood service and not by any flashy trend or interest of the moment. Otherwise, they can distract our efforts, dilute our energy, and get us caught up in our own hobbies, spiritual or temporal, that are not at the center of discipleship.

Brethren, we all know that it takes self-discipline to remain focused on the matters that have the greatest power to increase our love for God and fellowman, invigorate marriages, strengthen families, and build the kingdom of God on earth. Like a fruit tree with an abundance of branches and leaves, our lives need regular pruning to ensure that we use our energy and time to accomplish our real purpose—to “bring forth good fruit”!¹

You Are Not Alone

So how do we know what to select? We each have the responsibility to determine this for ourselves. However, we are commanded to diligently study the scriptures, heed the words of

the prophets, and make it a matter of faith-filled, serious, dedicated prayer.

Brethren, God is faithful. Through the Holy Spirit, He will speak to our minds and hearts concerning the path we should follow during each segment of our lives.

If our hearts are pure—if we seek not our own glory but the glory of Almighty God, if we seek to do His will, if we desire to bless the lives of our family and fellowman—we will not be left to walk alone. As President Monson has often reminded us, “When we are on the Lord’s errand, we are entitled to the Lord’s help.”²

Your Heavenly Father “will go before your face. [He] will be on your right hand and on your left, and [His] Spirit shall be in your hearts, and [His] angels round about you, to bear you up.”³

The Power of Doing

My dear brethren, divine blessings for priesthood service are activated by our diligent efforts, our willingness to sacrifice, and our desire to do what is right. Let us be the ones to act and not be acted upon. Preaching is fine, but sermons that do not lead to action are like fires without heat or water that cannot quench thirst.

It is in the application of doctrine that the purifying flame of the gospel grows and the power of the priesthood ignites our souls.

Thomas Edison, the man who bathed the world in glowing electric light, said that “the value of an idea lies in the using of it.”⁴ In a similar way, gospel doctrine becomes more precious when it is put to use.

We must not allow the doctrines of the priesthood to lie dormant in our hearts and unapplied in our lives. If there is a marriage or family in need of rescue—perhaps even our own—let’s not just wait and see. Rather, let us thank God for the plan of happiness that includes faith, repentance, forgiveness, and new beginnings. Applying priesthood doctrine will qualify us as husbands, as fathers, as sons who understand the *why* of the priesthood and its power to recapture and secure the beauty and holiness of eternal families.

General conference is always a good time for both hearing and doing. Therefore, let us “be . . . doers of the word, and not hearers only.”⁵ Brethren, I invite you to consider the words spoken by the servants of God this weekend. Then get on your knees. Ask God, our Heavenly Father, to enlighten your mind and touch your heart. Plead with God for guidance in your daily lives, in your Church responsibilities, and in your specific challenges at this time. Follow the promptings of the Spirit—do not delay. If you do all this, I promise that the Lord will not leave you to walk alone.

Continue in Patience

We know that despite our best intentions, things do not always go according to plan. We make mistakes in life and in our priesthood service. Occasionally we stumble and fall short.

When the Lord advises us to “continue in patience until [we] are perfected,”⁶ He is acknowledging that it takes time and perseverance. Understanding the *why* of the gospel and the *why* of the priesthood will help us to see the divine purpose of all of this. It will give us motivation and strength to do the right things, even when they are hard. Staying focused on the basic principles of gospel living will bless us with clarity, wisdom, and direction.

“Shall we not go on in so great a cause?”⁷ Yes, brethren, we will!

Guided by the Holy Spirit, we will learn from our mistakes. If we stumble, we will rise. If we falter, we will go on. We will never waver; we will never give up.

As a mighty brotherhood of the everlasting priesthood of God, we will stand together, shoulder to shoulder, focused on the principles of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and gratefully serving our God and fellowman with dedication and love.

God Lives!

My dear brethren, I testify to you this day that God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, live. They are real! They are there!

You are not alone. Your Father in Heaven cares about you and desires to bless and uphold you in righteousness.

Be assured that God speaks to mankind in our time. He will speak to you!

The Prophet Joseph Smith saw what he said he saw. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is restored to earth by the power and authority of Almighty God.

My prayer is that as bearers of His priesthood, we will ever stay attuned to the *why* of priesthood service and use the principles of the restored gospel to transform our lives and the lives of those whom we serve.

As we do so, the infinite power of the Atonement will purify, cleanse, and refine our spirits and characters until we become the men we are meant to become. Of this I testify in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Matthew 7:18.
2. Thomas S. Monson, "To Learn, to Do, to Be," *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2008, 62.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 84:88.
4. Thomas Edison, in Elbert Hubbard, *Little Journeys to the Homes of Good Men and Great*, Book 2 (1910), 155.
5. James 1:22.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 67:13.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 128:22.

Families under Covenant

By President Henry B. Eyring
First Counselor in the First Presidency

There is nothing that has come or will come into your family as important as the sealing blessings.

I appreciate being gathered with you in this meeting to which all the holders of the priesthood of God in the earth are invited. We are blessed to be presided over by President Thomas S. Monson. As the President of the Church, he is the one man alive who is responsible for the keys that seal families and all those priesthood ordinances necessary to attain eternal life, the greatest of all the gifts of God.

There is a father listening tonight who has come back from inactivity because he wants the assurance of that gift with all his heart. He and his wife love their two small children, a boy and a girl. Like other parents he can foresee heavenly happiness when he reads these words: "And that same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy."¹

That father listening with us tonight knows the path to that glorious destination. It is not easy. He already knows that. It took faith in Jesus Christ, deep repentance, and a change in his heart that came with a kind bishop helping him feel the Lord's loving forgiveness.

Wonderful changes continued as he went to the holy temple for an endowment that the Lord described to those whom He empowered in the first temple in this dispensation. It was in Kirtland, Ohio. The Lord said of that:

"Wherefore, for this cause I gave unto you the commandment that ye should go to the Ohio; and there I will give unto you my law; and there you shall be endowed with power from on high;

“And from thence, . . . for I have a great work laid up in store, for Israel shall be saved, and I will lead them whithersoever I will, and no power shall stay my hand.”²

For my recently activated friend and for all the priesthood, a great work ahead is to lead in saving the part of Israel for which we are or will be responsible, our families. My friend and his wife knew that requires being sealed by the power of the Melchizedek Priesthood in a holy temple of God.

He asked that I perform the sealing. He and his wife wanted it done as soon as possible. But with the busy time of general conference approaching, I left it to the couple and their bishop to work with my secretary to find the best date.

Imagine my surprise and delight when the father told me in church that the sealing is set for April 3. That was the day in 1836 when Elijah, the translated prophet, was sent to the Kirtland Temple to give the sealing power to Joseph Smith and to Oliver Cowdery. Those keys reside in the Church today and will continue to the end of time.³

It is the same divine authorization given by the Lord to Peter, as He had promised: “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”⁴

The return of Elijah blessed all who hold the priesthood. Elder Harold B. Lee made that clear as he spoke in general conference, quoting President Joseph Fielding Smith. Listen carefully: “I hold the priesthood; you brethren here hold the priesthood; we have received the Melchizedek Priesthood—which was held by Elijah and by other prophets and by Peter, James and John. But while we have authority to baptize, while we have authority to lay on hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost and to ordain others and do all these things, without the sealing power we could do nothing, for there would be no validity to that which we did.”

President Smith went on:

“The higher ordinances, the greater blessings which are essential to exaltation in the kingdom of God, and which can only be obtained in certain places, no man has a right to perform

except as he receives the authority to do it from the one who holds the keys. . . .

“. . . There is no man upon the face of this earth who has the right to go forth and administer in any of the ordinances of this gospel unless the President of the Church, who holds the keys, sanctions it. He has given us authority, he has put the sealing power in our priesthood, because he holds those keys.”⁵

That same assurance came from President Boyd K. Packer as he wrote of the sealing power. Knowing these words are true is a comfort to me, as it will be to the family I will seal on April 3: “Peter was to hold the keys. Peter was to hold the sealing power, . . . to bind or seal on earth or to loose on earth and it would be so in the heavens. Those keys belong to the President of the Church—to the prophet, seer, and revelator. That sacred sealing power is with the Church now. Nothing is regarded with more sacred contemplation by those who know the significance of this authority. Nothing is more closely held. There are relatively few men who [hold] this sealing power upon the earth at any given time—in each temple are brethren who have been given the sealing power. No one can get it except from the prophet, seer, and revelator and President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”⁶

At the coming of Elijah, not only was power given to the priesthood, but also hearts were to be turned: “The spirit, power, and calling of Elijah is, that ye have power to hold the key of the revelation, ordinances, oracles, powers and endowments of the fullness of the Melchizedek Priesthood and of the kingdom of God on the earth; and to receive, obtain, and perform all the ordinances belonging to the kingdom of God, even unto the turning of the hearts of the fathers unto the children, and the hearts of the children unto the fathers, even those who are in heaven.”⁷

That feeling of his heart turning has already come to my friend and to his family. It may have come to you in this meeting. You may have seen in your mind, as I have, the face of your father or your mother. It may have been a sister or a brother. It may have been a daughter or a son.

They may be in the spirit world or continents away from you. But joy came from a feeling that connections with them are sure because you are or can be bound to them by priesthood ordinances that God will honor.

Melchizedek Priesthood holders who are fathers in sealed families have been taught what they must do. There is nothing that has come or will come into your family as important as the sealing blessings. There is nothing more important than honoring the marriage and family covenants you have made or will make in the temples of God.

The way to do that is clear. The Holy Spirit of Promise, through our obedience and sacrifice, must seal our temple covenants in order to be realized in the world to come. President Harold B. Lee explained what it means to be sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise by quoting Elder Melvin J. Ballard: "We may deceive men but we cannot deceive the Holy Ghost, and our blessings will not be eternal unless they are also sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise. The Holy Ghost is one who reads the thoughts and hearts of men, and gives his sealing approval to the blessings pronounced upon their heads. Then it is binding, efficacious, and of full force."⁸

When Sister Eyring and I were sealed in the Logan Utah Temple, I did not understand then the full significance of that promise. I am still trying to understand all that it means, but my wife and I decided at the start of our nearly 50 years of marriage to invite the Holy Ghost as much as we could into our lives and into our family.

As a young father, sealed in the temple and with my heart turned to my wife and a young family, I met President Joseph Fielding Smith for the first time. In the First Presidency council room, where I had been invited, came an absolutely sure witness to me as President Harold B. Lee asked me, indicating President Smith, who was sitting next to him, "Do you believe that this man could be the prophet of God?"

President Smith had just entered the room and had not yet spoken a word. I am eternally grateful that I was able to answer because of what came down into my heart, "I know he is," and I

knew it as surely as I knew the sun was shining that he held the priesthood sealing power for all the earth.

That experience gave his words great power for me and my wife when, in a conference session on April 6, 1972, President Joseph Fielding Smith gave the following counsel: "It is the will of the Lord to strengthen and preserve the family unit. We plead with fathers to take their rightful place as the head of the house. We ask mothers to sustain and support their husbands and to be lights to their children."⁹

Let me suggest four things you can do as a priesthood father to lift and lead your family home again to be with Heavenly Father and the Savior.

First, gain and keep a sure witness that the keys of the priesthood are with us and held by the President of the Church. Pray for that every day. The answer will come with an increase in determination to lead your family, in your feelings of hope, and with greater happiness in your service. You will be more cheerful and optimistic, a great blessing for your wife and family.

The second imperative is to love your wife. It will take faith and humility to put her interests above your own in the struggles of life. You have the responsibility to provide for and to nurture the family with her while serving others. That can at times consume all the energy and strength you have. Age and illness may increase your wife's needs. If you choose even then to put her happiness above your own, I promise you that your love for her will increase.

Third, enlist the entire family to love each other. President Ezra Taft Benson taught:

"In an eternal sense, salvation is a family affair. . . .

"Above all else, children need to know and feel they are loved, wanted, and appreciated. They need to be assured of that often. Obviously, this is a role parents should fill, and most often the mother can do it best."¹⁰

But another crucial source for that feeling of being loved is love from other children in the family. Consistent care of brothers and sisters for each other will come only with persistent effort by parents and the help of God. You know that is true from experience in your own families. And it is confirmed each time

you read of the family conflicts faced by righteous Lehi and his wife, Sariah, in the Book of Mormon record.

The successes they won provide a guide for us. They taught the gospel of Jesus Christ so well and so persistently that children and even some descendants over generations had hearts softened toward God and toward each other. For instance, Nephi and others wrote and reached out to family members who had been their enemies. The Spirit at times softened the hearts of thousands and replaced hatred with love.

One way for you to reproduce the successes of Father Lehi is by the way you lead family prayers and family time, such as family home evenings. Give children opportunities to pray, when they can pray, for each other in the circle who need blessings. Discern quickly the beginnings of discord and recognize acts of unselfish service, especially to each other. When they pray for each other and serve each other, hearts will be softened and turned to each other and to their parents.

The fourth opportunity to lead your family in the Lord's way comes when discipline is needed. We can meet our obligation to correct in the Lord's way and then lead our children toward eternal life.

You will remember the words, but you may not have seen their power for a Melchizedek Priesthood holder preparing his family for living in the same sociality that they will have in the celestial kingdom. You remember the words. They are so familiar:

“No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned;

“By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile—

“Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reprov'd, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy;

“That he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death.”¹¹

And later the promise comes of great worth for us as fathers in Zion: “The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, and

thy scepter an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth; and thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever."¹²

That is a high standard for us, but when we with faith control our tempers and subdue our pride, the Holy Ghost gives His approval, and sacred promises and covenants become sure.

You will succeed through your faith that the Lord sent back the keys of the priesthood, which are still with us—with a sure bond of love with your wife, with the Lord's help in turning the hearts of your children to each other and to their parents, and with love guiding you to correct and exhort in a way that invites the Spirit.

I know that Jesus is the Christ and is our Savior. I testify that President Thomas S. Monson holds and exercises all the keys of the priesthood on the earth today. I love and sustain him. I love and pray for you. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Doctrine and Covenants 130:2.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 38:32–33.
3. See Joseph Fielding Smith, *Sealing Power and Salvation*, Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year (Jan. 12, 1971), speeches.byu.edu.
4. Matthew 16:19.
5. Joseph Fielding Smith, quoted by Harold B. Lee, in Conference Report, Oct. 1944, 75.
6. Boyd K. Packer, "The Holy Temple," *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Oct. 2010, 34.
7. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 11.
8. Melvin J. Ballard, quoted by Harold B. Lee, in Conference Report, Oct. 1970, 111.
9. Joseph Fielding Smith, "Counsel to the Saints and to the World," *Ensign*, July 1972, 27.
10. Ezra Taft Benson, "Salvation—a Family Affair," *Tambuli*, Nov. 1992, 3, 4; *Ensign*, July 1992, 2, 4.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 121:41–44.
12. Doctrine and Covenants 121:46.

Willing and Worthy to Serve

By President Thomas S. Monson

Miracles are everywhere to be found when the priesthood is understood, its power is honored and used properly, and faith is exerted.

My beloved brethren, how good it is to meet with you once again. Whenever I attend the general priesthood meeting, I reflect on the teachings of some of God's noble leaders who have spoken in the general priesthood meetings of the Church. Many have passed to their eternal reward, and yet from the brilliance of their minds, from the depths of their souls, and from the warmth of their hearts, they have given us inspired direction. I share with you tonight some of their teachings concerning the priesthood.

From the Prophet Joseph Smith: "Priesthood is an everlasting principle, and existed with God from eternity, and will to eternity, without beginning of days or end of years."¹

From the words of President Wilford Woodruff, we learn: "The Holy Priesthood is the channel through which God communicates and deals with man upon the earth; and the heavenly messengers that have visited the earth to communicate with man are men who held and honored the priesthood while in the flesh; and everything that God has caused to be done for the salvation of man, from the coming of man upon the earth to the redemption of the world, has been and will be by virtue of the everlasting priesthood."²

President Joseph F. Smith further clarified: "The priesthood . . . is . . . the power of God delegated to man by which man can

act in the earth for the salvation of the human family, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, and act legitimately; not assuming that authority, nor borrowing it from generations that are dead and gone, but authority that has been given in this day in which we live by ministering angels and spirits from above, *direct from the presence of Almighty God.*"³

And finally from President John Taylor: "What is priesthood? . . . It is the government of God, whether on the earth or in the heavens, for it is by that power, agency, or principle that all things are governed on the earth and in the heavens, and by that power that all things are upheld and sustained. It governs all things—it directs all things—it sustains all things—and has to do with all things that God and truth are associated with."⁴

How blessed we are to be here in these last days, when the priesthood of God is upon the earth. How privileged we are to bear that priesthood. The priesthood is not so much a gift as it is a commission to serve, a privilege to lift, and an opportunity to bless the lives of others.

With these opportunities come responsibilities and duties. I love and cherish the noble word *duty* and all that it implies.

In one capacity or another, in one setting or another, I have been attending priesthood meetings for the past 72 years—since I was ordained a deacon at the age of 12. Time certainly marches on. Duty keeps cadence with that march. Duty does not dim nor diminish. Catastrophic conflicts come and go, but the war waged for the souls of men continues without abatement. Like a clarion call comes the word of the Lord to you, to me, and to priesthood holders everywhere: "Wherefore, now let every man learn his *duty*, and to act in the office in which he is appointed, in all diligence."⁵

The call of duty came to Adam, to Noah, to Abraham, to Moses, to Samuel, to David. It came to the Prophet Joseph Smith and to each of his successors. The call of duty came to the boy Nephi when he was instructed by the Lord, through his father Lehi, to return to Jerusalem with his brothers to obtain the brass plates from Laban. Nephi's brothers murmured, saying it was a hard thing which had been asked of them. What was Nephi's response? Said he, "I will go and do the things which the Lord

hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.”⁶

When that same call comes to you and to me, what will be our response? Will we murmur, as did Laman and Lemuel, and say, “This is a hard thing required of us”?⁷ Or will we, with Nephi, individually declare, “I will go. I will do”? Will we be willing to serve and to obey?

At times the wisdom of God appears as being foolish or just too difficult, but one of the greatest and most valuable lessons we can learn in mortality is that when God speaks and a man obeys, that man will always be right.

When I think of the word *duty* and how performing our duty can enrich our lives and the lives of others, I recall the words penned by a renowned poet and author:

*I slept and dreamt
That life was joy
I awoke and saw
That life was duty
I acted and behold
Duty was joy.*⁸

Robert Louis Stevenson put it another way. Said he, “I know what pleasure is, for I have done good work.”⁹

As we perform our duties and exercise our priesthood, we will find true joy. We will experience the satisfaction of having completed our tasks.

We have been taught the specific duties of the priesthood which we hold, whether it be the Aaronic or the Melchizedek Priesthood. I urge you to contemplate those duties and then do all within your power to fulfill them. In order to do so, each must be worthy. Let us have ready hands, clean hands, and willing hands, that we may participate in providing what our Heavenly Father would have others receive from Him. If we are not worthy, it is possible to lose the power of the priesthood; and if we lose it, we have lost the essence of exaltation. Let us be worthy to serve.

President Harold B. Lee, one of the great teachers in the Church, said: “When one becomes a holder of the priesthood, he becomes an agent of the Lord. He should think of his calling as though he were on the Lord’s errand.”¹⁰

During World War II, in the early part of 1944, an experience involving the priesthood took place as United States marines were taking Kwajalein Atoll, part of the Marshall Islands and located in the Pacific Ocean about midway between Australia and Hawaii. What took place in this regard was related by a correspondent—not a member of the Church—who worked for a newspaper in Hawaii. In the 1944 newspaper article he wrote following the experience, he explained that he and other correspondents were in the second wave behind the marines at Kwajalein Atoll. As they advanced, they noticed a young marine floating facedown in the water, obviously badly wounded. The shallow water around him was red with his blood. And then they noticed another marine moving toward his wounded comrade. The second marine was also wounded, with his left arm hanging helplessly by his side. He lifted up the head of the one who was floating in the water in order to keep him from drowning. In a panicky voice he called for help. The correspondents looked again at the boy he was supporting and called back, “Son, there is nothing we can do for this boy.”

“Then,” wrote the correspondent, “I saw something that I had never seen before.” This boy, badly wounded himself, made his way to the shore with the seemingly lifeless body of his fellow marine. He “put the head of his companion on his knee. . . . What a picture that was—these two mortally wounded boys—both . . . clean, wonderful-looking young men, even in their distressing situation. And the one boy bowed his head over the other and said, ‘I command you, in the name of Jesus Christ and by the power of the priesthood, to remain alive until I can get medical help.’” The correspondent concluded his article: “The three of us [the two marines and I] are here in the hospital. The doctors don’t know [how they made it alive], but I know.”¹¹

Miracles are everywhere to be found when the priesthood is understood, its power is honored and used properly, and faith is exerted. When faith replaces doubt, when selfless service

eliminates selfish striving, the power of God brings to pass His purposes.

The call of duty can come quietly as we who hold the priesthood respond to the assignments we receive. President George Albert Smith, that modest but effective leader, declared, “It is your duty first of all to learn what the Lord wants and then by the power and strength of His holy Priesthood to [so] magnify your calling in the presence of your fellows . . . that the people will be glad to follow you.”¹²

Such a call of duty—a much less dramatic call but one which nonetheless helped to save a soul—came to me in 1950 when I was a newly called bishop. My responsibilities as a bishop were many and varied, and I tried to the best of my ability to do all that was required of me. The United States was engaged in a different war by then. Because many of our members were serving in the armed services, an assignment came from Church headquarters for all bishops to provide each serviceman a subscription to the *Church News* and the *Improvement Era*, the Church’s magazine at that time. In addition, each bishop was asked to write a personal, monthly letter to each serviceman from his ward. Our ward had 23 men in uniform. The priesthood quorums, with effort, supplied the funds for the subscriptions to the publications. I undertook the task, even the duty, to write 23 personal letters each month. After all these years I still have copies of many of my letters and the responses received. Tears come easily when these letters are reread. It is a joy to learn again of a soldier’s pledge to live the gospel, a sailor’s decision to keep faith with his family.

One evening I handed to a sister in the ward the stack of 23 letters for the current month. Her assignment was to handle the mailing and to maintain the constantly changing address list. She glanced at one envelope and, with a smile, asked, “Bishop, don’t you ever get discouraged? Here is another letter to Brother Bryson. This is the 17th letter you have sent to him without a reply.”

I responded, “Well, maybe this will be the month.” As it turned out, that *was* the month. For the first time, he responded to my letter. His reply is a keepsake, a treasure. He was serving far

away on a distant shore, isolated, homesick, alone. He wrote, "Dear Bishop, I ain't much at writin' letters." (I could have told him *that* several months earlier.) His letter continued, "Thank you for the *Church News* and magazines, but most of all thank you for the personal letters. I have turned over a new leaf. I have been ordained a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood. My heart is full. I am a happy man."

Brother Bryson was no happier than was his bishop. I had learned the practical application of the adage "Do [your] duty; that is best; leave unto [the] Lord the rest."¹³

Years later, while attending the Salt Lake Cottonwood Stake when James E. Faust served as its president, I related that account in an effort to encourage attention to our servicemen. After the meeting, a fine-looking young man came forward. He took my hand in his and asked, "Bishop Monson, do you remember me?"

I suddenly realized who he was. "Brother Bryson!" I exclaimed. "How are you? What are you doing in the Church?"

With warmth and obvious pride, he responded, "I'm fine. I serve in the presidency of my elders quorum. Thank you again for your concern for me and the personal letters which you sent and which I treasure."

Brethren, the world is in need of our help. Are we doing all we should? Do we remember the words of President John Taylor: "If you do not magnify your callings, God will hold you responsible for those whom you might have saved had you done your duty"?¹⁴ There are feet to steady, hands to grasp, minds to encourage, hearts to inspire, and souls to save. The blessings of eternity await you. Yours is the privilege to be not spectators but participants on the stage of priesthood service. Let us hearken to the stirring reminder found in the Epistle of James: "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."¹⁵

Let us learn and contemplate our duty. Let us be willing and worthy to serve. Let us in the performance of our duty follow in the footsteps of the Master. As you and I walk the pathway Jesus walked, we will discover He is more than the babe in Bethlehem, more than the carpenter's son, more than the greatest teacher ever to live. We will come to know Him as the Son of God, our Savior and our Redeemer. When to Him came the call of duty, He

answered, “Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever.”¹⁶ May each of us do likewise, I pray in His holy name, the name of Jesus Christ, the Lord, amen.

Notes

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 104.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Wilford Woodruff* (2004), 38.
3. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (1939), 139–40; emphasis added.
4. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: John Taylor* (2001), 119.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 107:99; emphasis added.
6. 1 Nephi 3:7; see also verses 1–5.
7. See 1 Nephi 3:5.
8. Rabindranath Tagore, in William Jay Jacobs, *Mother Teresa: Helping the Poor* (1991), 42.
9. Robert Louis Stevenson, in Elbert Hubbard II, comp., *The Note Book of Elbert Hubbard: Mottoes, Epigrams, Short Essays, Passages, Orphic Sayings and Preachments* (1927), 55.
10. *Stand Ye in Holy Places: Selected Sermons and Writings of President Harold B. Lee* (1976), 255.
11. In Ernest Eberhard Jr., “Giving Our Young Men the Proper Priesthood Perspective,” typescript, July 19, 1971, 4–5, Church History Library.
12. George Albert Smith, in Conference Report, Apr. 1942, 14.
13. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “The Legend Beautiful,” in *The Complete Poetical Works of Longfellow* (1893), 258.
14. *Teachings: John Taylor*, 164.
15. James 1:22.
16. Moses 4:2.

The Merciful Obtain Mercy

By President Dieter F. Uchtdorf

Second Counselor in the First Presidency

When our hearts are filled with the love of God, we become “kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving.”

My dear brothers and sisters, not long ago I received a letter from a concerned mother who pleaded for a general conference talk on a topic that would specifically benefit her two children. A rift had grown between them, and they had stopped speaking to each other. The mother was heartbroken. In the letter she assured me that a general conference message on this topic would reconcile her children, and all would be well.

This good sister’s sincere and heartfelt plea was just one of several promptings I have received over these last months that I should say a few words today on a topic that is a growing concern—not only for a worried mother but for many in the Church and, indeed, the world.

I am impressed by the faith of this loving mother that a general conference talk could help heal the relationship between her children. I am sure that her confidence was not so much in the abilities of the speakers but in “the virtue of the word of God,” which has a “more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than . . . anything else.”¹ Dear sister, I pray that the Spirit will touch your children’s hearts.

When Relationships Go Bad

Strained and broken relationships are as old as humankind itself. Ancient Cain was the first who allowed the cancer of bitterness and malice to canker his heart. He tilled the ground of his soul with envy and hatred and allowed these feelings to ripen

until he did the unthinkable—murdering his own brother and becoming, in the process, the father of Satan’s lies.²

Since those first days the spirit of envy and hatred has led to some of the most tragic stories in history. It turned Saul against David, the sons of Jacob against their brother Joseph, Laman and Lemuel against Nephi, and Amalickiah against Moroni.

I imagine that every person on earth has been affected in some way by the destructive spirit of contention, resentment, and revenge. Perhaps there are even times when we recognize this spirit in ourselves. When we feel hurt, angry, or envious, it is quite easy to judge other people, often assigning dark motives to their actions in order to justify our own feelings of resentment.

The Doctrine

Of course, we know this is wrong. The doctrine is clear. We all depend on the Savior; none of us can be saved without Him. Christ’s Atonement is infinite and eternal. Forgiveness for *our* sins comes with conditions. We must repent, and we must be willing to forgive others. Jesus taught: “Forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not . . . [stands] condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin”³ and “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.”⁴

Of course, these words seem perfectly reasonable—when applied to someone else. We can so clearly and easily see the harmful results that come when *others* judge and hold grudges. And we certainly don’t like it when people judge us.

But when it comes to our own prejudices and grievances, we too often justify our anger as righteous and our judgment as reliable and only appropriate. Though we cannot look into another’s heart, we assume that we know a bad motive or even a bad person when we see one. We make exceptions when it comes to our own bitterness because we feel that, in our case, we have all the information we need to hold someone else in contempt.

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, said that those who pass judgment on others are “inexcusable.” The moment we judge someone else, he explained, we condemn ourselves, for none is without sin.⁵ Refusing to forgive is a grievous sin—one the Savior warned against. Jesus’s own disciples had “sought occasion against [each other] and forgave not one another in their

hearts; and for this evil they were afflicted and sorely chastened.”⁶

Our Savior has spoken so clearly on this subject that there is little room for private interpretation. “I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive,” but then He said, “. . . of you it is *required* to forgive *all* men.”⁷

May I add a footnote here? When the Lord requires that we forgive all men, that includes forgiving ourselves. Sometimes, of all the people in the world, the one who is the hardest to forgive—as well as perhaps the one who is most in need of our forgiveness—is the person looking back at us in the mirror.

The Bottom Line

This topic of judging others could actually be taught in a two-word sermon. When it comes to hating, gossiping, ignoring, ridiculing, holding grudges, or wanting to cause harm, please apply the following:

Stop it!

It’s that simple. We simply have to stop judging others and replace judgmental thoughts and feelings with a heart full of love for God and His children. God is our Father. We are His children. We are all brothers and sisters. I don’t know exactly how to articulate this point of *not judging others* with sufficient eloquence, passion, and persuasion to make it stick. I can quote scripture, I can try to expound doctrine, and I will even quote a bumper sticker I recently saw. It was attached to the back of a car whose driver appeared to be a little rough around the edges, but the words on the sticker taught an insightful lesson. It read, “Don’t judge me because I sin differently than you.”

We must recognize that we are all imperfect—that we are beggars before God. Haven’t we all, at one time or another, meekly approached the mercy seat and pleaded for grace? Haven’t we wished with all the energy of our souls for mercy—to be forgiven for the mistakes we have made and the sins we have committed?

Because we all depend on the mercy of God, how can we deny to others any measure of the grace we so desperately desire for ourselves? My beloved brothers and sisters, should we not forgive as we wish to be forgiven?

The Love of God

Is this difficult to do?

Yes, of course.

Forgiving ourselves and others is not easy. In fact, for most of us it requires a major change in our attitude and way of thinking—even a change of heart. But there is good news. This “mighty change”⁸ of heart is exactly what the gospel of Jesus Christ is designed to bring into our lives.

How is it done? Through the love of God.

When our hearts are filled with the love of God, something good and pure happens to us. We “keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world.”⁹

The more we allow the love of God to govern our minds and emotions—the more we allow our love for our Heavenly Father to swell within our hearts—the easier it is to love others with the pure love of Christ. As we open our hearts to the glowing dawn of the love of God, the darkness and cold of animosity and envy will eventually fade.

As always, Christ is our exemplar. In His teachings as in His life, He showed us the way. He forgave the wicked, the vulgar, and those who sought to hurt and to do Him harm.

Jesus said it is easy to love those who love us; even the wicked can do *that*. But Jesus Christ taught a higher law. His words echo through the centuries and are meant for us today. They are meant for all who desire to be His disciples. They are meant for you and me: “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.”¹⁰

When our hearts are filled with the love of God, we become “kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving [each other], even as God for Christ’s sake [forgave us].”¹¹

The pure love of Christ can remove the scales of resentment and wrath from our eyes, allowing us to see others the way our Heavenly Father sees us: as flawed and imperfect mortals who have potential and worth far beyond our capacity to imagine. Because God loves us so much, we too must love and forgive each other.

The Way of the Disciple

My dear brothers and sisters, consider the following questions as a self-test:

Do you harbor a grudge against someone else?

Do you gossip, even when what you say may be true?

Do you exclude, push away, or punish others because of something they have done?

Do you secretly envy another?

Do you wish to cause harm to someone?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may want to apply the two-word sermon from earlier: stop it!

In a world of accusations and unfriendliness, it is easy to gather and cast stones. But before we do so, let us remember the words of the One who is our Master and model: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone."¹²

Brothers and sisters, let us put down our stones.

Let us be kind.

Let us forgive.

Let us talk peacefully with each other.

Let the love of God fill our hearts.

"Let us do good unto all men."¹³

The Savior promised: "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over. . . . For with the same measure that [you use] it shall be measured to you again."¹⁴

Shouldn't this promise be enough to always focus our efforts on acts of kindness, forgiveness, and charity instead of on any negative behavior?

Let us, as disciples of Jesus Christ, return good for evil.¹⁵ Let us not seek revenge or allow our wrath to overcome us.

"For it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

"Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink. . . .

"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."¹⁶

Remember: in the end, it is the merciful who obtain mercy.¹⁷

As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, wherever we may be, let us be known as a people who “have love one to another.”¹⁸

Love One Another

Brothers and sisters, there is enough heartache and sorrow in this life without our adding to it through our own stubbornness, bitterness, and resentment.

We are not perfect.

The people around us are not perfect.¹⁹ People do things that annoy, disappoint, and anger. In this mortal life it will always be that way.

Nevertheless, we must let go of our grievances. Part of the purpose of mortality is to learn how to let go of such things. *That is the Lord’s way.*

Remember, heaven is filled with those who have this in common: They are forgiven. And they forgive.

Lay your burden at the Savior’s feet. Let go of judgment. Allow Christ’s Atonement to change and heal your heart. Love one another. Forgive one another.

The merciful will obtain mercy.

Of this I testify in the name of the One who loved so well and so completely that He gave His life for us, His friends—in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Alma 31:5.
2. See Moses 5:16–32.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 64:9.
4. Matthew 5:7.
5. See Romans 2:1.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 64:8.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 64:10; emphasis added.
8. Mosiah 5:2.
9. 1 John 5:3–4.
10. Matthew 5:44; see also verses 45–47.
11. Ephesians 4:32.
12. John 8:7.
13. Galatians 6:10.
14. Luke 6:38.
15. See Matthew 5:39–41.
16. Romans 12:19–21.
17. See Matthew 5:7.
18. John 13:35.
19. See Romans 3:23.

Thanks Be to God

By Elder Russell M. Nelson

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

How much better it would be if all could be more aware of God's providence and love and express that gratitude to Him.

Dear brothers and sisters, we thank you for your sustaining support and your devotion. We express our gratitude and love to each of you.

Recently, Sister Nelson and I enjoyed the beauty of tropical fish in a small private aquarium. Fish with vivid colors and of a variety of shapes and sizes darted back and forth. I asked the attendant nearby, "Who provides food for these beautiful fish?"

She responded, "I do."

Then I asked, "Have they ever thanked you?"

She replied, "Not yet!"

I thought of some people I know who are just as oblivious to their Creator and their true "bread of life."¹ They live from day to day without an awareness of God and His goodness unto them.

How much better it would be if all could be more aware of God's providence and love and express that gratitude to Him. Ammon taught, "Let us give thanks to [God], for he doth work righteousness forever."² Our degree of gratitude is a measure of our love for Him.

God is the Father of our spirits.³ He has a glorified, perfected body of flesh and bone.⁴ We lived with Him in heaven before we were born.⁵ And when He created us physically, we were created in the image of God, each with a personal body.⁶

Think of our physical sustenance. It is truly heaven-sent. The necessities of air, food, and water all come to us as gifts from a loving Heavenly Father. The earth was created to support our

brief sojourn in mortality.⁷ We were born with a capacity to grow, love, marry, and form families.

Marriage and family are ordained of God. The family is the most important social unit in time and in eternity. Under God's great plan of happiness, families can be sealed in temples and be prepared to return to dwell in His holy presence forever. That is eternal life! It fulfills the deepest longings of the human soul—the natural yearning for endless association with beloved members of one's family.

We are part of His divine purpose: "My work and my glory," He said, is "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."⁸ In order to achieve those objectives, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."⁹ That act was a supernal manifestation of God's love. "For [He] sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."¹⁰

Central to God's eternal plan is the mission of His Son, Jesus Christ.¹¹ He came to redeem God's children.¹² Because of the Lord's Atonement, resurrection (or immortality) became a reality.¹³ Because of the Atonement, eternal life became a possibility for all who would qualify. Jesus so explained:

"I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

"And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."¹⁴

For the Atonement of the Lord and His gift of resurrection—for this sublime message of Easter—thanks be to God!

Physical Gifts

Our Heavenly Father loves His children.¹⁵ He has blessed each with physical and spiritual gifts. Let me speak of each type. When you sing "I Am a Child of God," think of His gift to you of your own physical body. The many amazing attributes of your body attest to your own "divine nature."¹⁶

Each organ of your body is a wondrous gift from God. Each eye has an autofocusing lens. Nerves and muscles control two eyes to make a single three-dimensional image. The eyes are connected to the brain, which records the sights seen.

Your heart is an incredible pump.¹⁷ It has four delicate valves that control the direction of blood flow. These valves open and close more than 100,000 times a day—36 million times a year. Yet, unless altered by disease, they are able to withstand such stress almost indefinitely.

Think of the body's defense system. To protect it from harm, it perceives pain. In response to infection, it generates antibodies. The skin provides protection. It warns against injury that excessive heat or cold might cause.

The body renews its own outdated cells and regulates the levels of its own vital ingredients. The body heals its cuts, bruises, and broken bones. Its capacity for reproduction is another sacred gift from God.

Be we reminded that a perfect body is not required to achieve one's divine destiny. In fact, some of the sweetest spirits are housed in frail or imperfect bodies. Great spiritual strength is often developed by people with physical challenges, precisely because they are so challenged.

Anyone who studies the workings of the human body has surely "seen God moving in his majesty and power."¹⁸ Because the body is governed by divine law, any healing comes by obedience to the law upon which that blessing is predicated.¹⁹

Yet some people erroneously think that these marvelous physical attributes happened by chance or resulted from a big bang somewhere. Ask yourself, "Could an explosion in a printing shop produce a dictionary?" The likelihood is *most* remote. But if so, it could never heal its own torn pages or reproduce its own newer editions!

If the body's capacity for normal function, defense, repair, regulation, and regeneration were to prevail without limit, life here would continue in perpetuity. Yes, we would be stranded here on earth! Mercifully for us, our Creator provided for aging and other processes that would ultimately result in our physical death. Death, like birth, is part of life. Scripture teaches that "it was not expedient that man should be reclaimed from this temporal death, for that would destroy the great plan of happiness."²⁰ To return to God through the gateway we call death is a joy for those who love Him and are prepared to meet Him.²¹

Eventually the time will come when each “spirit and . . . body shall be reunited again in . . . perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame,”²² never to be separated again. For these physical gifts, thanks be to God!

Spiritual Gifts

Important as is the body, it serves as a tabernacle for one’s eternal spirit. Our spirits existed in the premortal realm²³ and will continue to live after the body dies.²⁴ The spirit provides the body with animation and personality.²⁵ In this life and in the next, spirit and body, when joined together, become a living soul of supernal worth.

Because one’s spirit is so important, its development is of eternal consequence. It is strengthened as we communicate in humble prayer with our loving Heavenly Father.²⁶

The attributes by which we shall be judged one day are all spiritual.²⁷ These include love, virtue, integrity, compassion, and service to others.²⁸ Your spirit, coupled with and housed in your body, is able to develop and manifest these attributes in ways that are vital to your eternal progression.²⁹ Spiritual progress is attained through the steps of faith, repentance, baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end, including the endowment and sealing ordinances of the holy temple.³⁰

Just as the body requires daily food for survival, the spirit needs nourishment as well. The spirit is nurtured by eternal truth. Last year we celebrated the 400th anniversary of the King James translation of the Holy Bible. And we have had the Book of Mormon for nearly 200 years. It has now been translated in its entirety or as selections into 107 languages. Because of these and other precious scriptures, we know that God is our Eternal Father and that His Son, Jesus Christ, is our Savior and Redeemer. For these spiritual gifts, thanks be to God!

Gospel Gifts

We know that prophets of many dispensations, such as Adam, Noah, Moses, and Abraham, all taught of the divinity of our Heavenly Father and of Jesus Christ. Our present dispensation was introduced by Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ when They appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1820.

The Church was organized in 1830. Now, 182 years later, we remain under covenant to take the gospel to “every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.”³¹ As we do so, both givers and receivers will be blessed.

Ours is the responsibility to teach His children and awaken in them an awareness of God. Long ago, King Benjamin said:

“Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; . . .

“ . . . Believe that ye must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God; and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you; and now, if you believe all these things see that ye do them.”³²

God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, but we are not. Each day, ours is the challenge to access the power of the Atonement so that we can truly change, become more Christlike, and qualify for the gift of exaltation and live eternally with God, Jesus Christ, and our families.³³ For these powers, privileges, and gospel gifts, thanks be to God!

I testify that He lives, that Jesus is the Christ, and that this is His Church, restored in these latter days to accomplish its divine destiny. We are led today by President Thomas S. Monson, whom we love and sustain with all our hearts, as we also sustain his counselors and the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators. I so testify in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. John 6:35, 48; see also verse 51.
2. Alma 26:8; see also Alma 7:23.
3. See Acts 17:27–29.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 130:22.
5. See Jeremiah 1:4–5; Romans 8:16; Hebrews 12:9; Moses 6:51.
6. See Genesis 2:7; 1 Corinthians 15:44; Moses 3:7.
7. See 1 Nephi 17:36.
8. Moses 1:39.
9. John 3:16.
10. John 3:17.
11. His purposes are succinctly summarized in 3 Nephi 27:13–22.
12. See Alma 11:40.
13. See 2 Nephi 9:6–7, 20–22.
14. John 11:25–26.
15. See 1 John 4:10; 1 Nephi 17:40.
16. 2 Peter 1:4.
17. The heart pumps about 2,000 gallons (7,570 L) per day.
18. Doctrine and Covenants 88:47.
19. See Doctrine and Covenants 130:21. Indeed, that divine law is incontrovertible.
20. Alma 42:8.
21. The Psalmist expressed the viewpoint of Deity: “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of

- his saints” (Psalm 116:15); see also Ecclesiastes 12:7.
22. Alma 11:43; see also Ecclesiastes 12:7; Alma 40:23; Doctrine and Covenants 138:17.
 23. See Doctrine and Covenants 93:38.
 24. See Alma 40:11; Abraham 3:18.
 25. The spirit is in the likeness of the person (see Doctrine and Covenants 77:2).
 26. See 3 Nephi 14:9–11.
 27. The spirit, not the body, is the active, responsible component of the soul. Without the spirit, the body is dead (see James 2:26). It is the spirit, therefore, that chooses good or evil and will be held accountable for both the positive and negative attributes it possesses at the Final Judgment (see Alma 41:3–7).
 28. Spiritual attributes also include “faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, godliness, charity, humility, [and] diligence” (Doctrine and Covenants 4:6).
 29. See 2 Nephi 2:11–16, 21–26; Moroni 10:33–34.
 30. This is the doctrine of Christ (see 2 Nephi 31:11–21).
 31. Mosiah 15:28; see also 1 Nephi 19:17; 2 Nephi 26:13; Mosiah 3:20; 15:28; 16:1; Alma 37:4; Doctrine and Covenants 1:18–23; 77:11; 133:37.
 32. Mosiah 4:9–10.
 33. “Eternal life . . . is the greatest of all the gifts of God” (Doctrine and Covenants 14:7).

Special Lessons

By Elder Ronald A. Rasband
Of the Presidency of the Seventy

It is my hope and prayer that we will continue to bear nobly our burdens and to reach out to those among us who are suffering.

For the past 20 months, our family has been blessed with the privilege of having a very special baby.

Little Paxton, our grandson, was born with a very rare chromosomal deletion, a genetic disorder that distinguishes him, literally, as one in hundreds of millions. For our daughter and her husband, an uncharted, life-changing journey began when Paxton was born. This experience has become a crucible for learning special lessons tied to the eternities.

Dear Elder Russell M. Nelson, who just spoke to us, taught:

“For reasons usually unknown, some people are born with physical limitations. Specific parts of the body may be abnormal. Regulatory systems may be out of balance. And all of our bodies are subject to disease and death. Nevertheless, the gift of a physical body is priceless. . . .

“A perfect body is not required to achieve a divine destiny. In fact, some of the sweetest spirits are housed in frail frames. . . .

“Eventually the time will come when each ‘spirit and . . . body shall be reunited again in . . . perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame’ (Alma 11:43). Then, thanks to the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we can become perfected in Him.”¹

To all of you who have challenges, concerns, disappointments, or heartaches with a dear one, know this: with infinite love and everlasting compassion, God our Heavenly Father loves your afflicted one, and He loves you!

Some might ask when faced with such suffering, how could Almighty God let this happen? And then that seemingly inevitable question, why did this happen to me? Why must we experience disease and events that disable or call precious family members home early or extend their years in pain? Why the heartaches?

At these moments we can turn to the great plan of happiness authored by our Heavenly Father. That plan, when presented in the pre-earth life, prompted us all to shout for joy.² Put simply, this life is training for eternal exaltation, and that process means tests and trials. It has always been so, and no one is spared.

Trusting in God's will is central to our mortality. With faith in Him, we draw upon the power of Christ's Atonement at those times when questions abound and answers are few.

After His Resurrection, when visiting the Americas, our Savior, Jesus Christ, reached out to all with this invitation:

"Have ye any that are sick among you? Bring them hither. Have ye any that are lame, or blind, or halt, or maimed, or leprous, or that are withered, or that are deaf, or that are afflicted in any manner? Bring them hither and I will heal them, for I have compassion upon you; my bowels are filled with mercy. . . .

"And it came to pass that when he had thus spoken, all the multitude, with one accord, did go forth with their sick and their afflicted, and their lame, and with their blind, and with their dumb, and with all them that were afflicted in any manner; and he did heal them every one as they were brought forth unto him."³

Great strength can be found in the words "all the multitude . . . did go forth"—*all*, brothers and sisters. We *all* face challenges. And then the phrase: "that were afflicted in any manner." All of us can identify, can't we?

Shortly after precious Paxton was born, we knew Heavenly Father would bless us and teach us special lessons. As his father and I put our fingers on his tiny head in the first of many priesthood blessings, the words came into my mind from the ninth chapter of John: "that the works of God should be made manifest in him."⁴

God's works are definitely being made manifest through Paxton.

We are learning patience, faith, and gratitude through the balm of service, endless hours of intense emotions, tears of empathy, and the prayers and expressions of love for dear ones in need, especially Paxton and his parents.

President James E. Faust, my boyhood stake president, said: "I have a great appreciation for those loving parents who stoically bear and overcome their anguish and heartbreak for a child who was born with or who has developed a serious mental or physical infirmity. This anguish often continues every day, without relief, during the lifetime of the parent or the child. Not infrequently, parents are required to give superhuman nurturing care that never ceases, day or night. Many a mother's arms and heart have ached years on end, giving comfort and relieving the suffering of her special child."⁵

As described in Mosiah, we have witnessed the Savior's pure love given to Paxton's family, which love is available to all: "And now it came to pass that the burdens which were laid upon Alma and his brethren were made light; yea, the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord."⁶

One night early in Paxton's life, we were in the neonatal intensive care unit of the wonderful Primary Children's Medical Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, marveling at the dedicated, undivided attention given by the doctors, nurses, and caregivers. I asked my daughter how we would ever pay for this and ventured a guess at what the cost would be. A doctor standing nearby suggested that I was "way low" and that little Paxton's care would cost substantially more than I had estimated. We learned that much of the expense for care given in this hospital is covered by the generous gifts of time and monetary contributions of others. His words humbled me as I thought of the worth of this tiny little soul to those who were so carefully watching over him.

I was reminded of a familiar missionary scripture that took on new meaning: "Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God."⁷

I wept as I pondered the limitless love our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, have for each one of us, while learning in a powerful way what the worth of a soul is, both physically and spiritually, to God.

Paxton's family has learned they are surrounded by countless heavenly and earthly ministering angels. Some have quietly slipped in when needed and silently slipped out. Others have been at the door with food, doing the laundry, picking up the siblings, calling with encouragement, and especially praying for Paxton. Thus another special lesson learned: If you come upon a person who is drowning, would you ask if they need help—or would it be better to just jump in and save them from the deepening waters? The offer, while well meaning and often given, "Let me know if I can help" is really no help at all.

We continue to learn the important value of being aware of and interested in the lives of those around us, learning not only the importance of giving help but also the overwhelming joy that comes from helping others.

Dear President Thomas S. Monson, who is such a magnificent example of lifting the downtrodden, said: "God bless all who endeavor to be their brother's keeper, who give to ameliorate suffering, who strive with all that is good within them to make a better world. Have you noticed that such individuals have a brighter smile? Their footsteps are more certain. They have an aura about them of contentment and satisfaction . . . for one cannot participate in helping others without experiencing a rich blessing himself."⁸

Though we will face trials, adversities, disabilities, heartaches, and all manner of afflictions, our caring, loving Savior will always be there for us. He has promised:

"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. . . .

"My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."⁹

How grateful we are to our Father in Heaven for our champion Paxton. Through him the Lord has manifest His works and continues to teach us these valuable, sacred, and special lessons.

I would like to close with the words from a beloved hymn:

*We are all enlisted till the conflict is o'er;
 Happy are we! Happy are we!
 Soldiers in the army, there's a bright crown in store;
 We shall win and wear it by and by.*¹⁰

Brothers and sisters, it is my hope and prayer that we will continue to bear nobly our burdens and to reach out to those among us who are suffering and in need of being lifted and encouraged. May we each thank God for His blessings and renew our commitment to our Father in Heaven of humble service to His children. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Russell M. Nelson, "We Are Children of God," *Liahona*, Jan. 1999, 103; *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 85, 86.
2. See Job 38:7.
3. 3 Nephi 17:7, 9.
4. John 9:3.
5. James E. Faust, "The Works of God," *Ensign*, Nov. 1984, 54.
6. Mosiah 24:15.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 18:10.
8. Thomas S. Monson, "Our Brothers' Keepers," *Ensign*, June 1998, 39.
9. John 14:18, 27.
10. "We Are All Enlisted," *Hymns*, no. 250.

The Vision of Prophets regarding Relief Society: Faith, Family, Relief

By **Julie B. Beck**

Recently Released Relief Society General President

Faith, family, and relief—these three simple words have come to express the vision of prophets for sisters in the Church.

In recent years I have been impressed to speak often about Relief Society—its purposes and qualities,¹ the value of its history,² its work, and its partnership with bishops and Melchizedek Priesthood quorums.³ It seems important now to focus some attention on the vision of prophets regarding Relief Society.⁴

Just as the Lord’s prophets have continually taught elders and high priests their purposes and duties, they have shared their vision for the sisters of the Relief Society. From their counsel, it is clear that the purposes of Relief Society are to increase faith and personal righteousness, strengthen families and homes, and seek out and help those in need. *Faith, family, and relief*—these three simple words have come to express the vision of prophets for sisters in the Church.

Since the beginning of the Restoration, prophets have shared their vision of strong, faithful, purposeful women who understand their eternal value and purpose. When the Prophet Joseph Smith established Relief Society, he directed its first president to “preside over this society, in taking care of the poor—administering to their wants, and attending to the various

affairs of this institution."⁵ He envisioned the organization as "a select society, separate from all the evils of the world."⁶

Brigham Young, the second President of the Church, instructed his counselors and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles to direct bishops to "let [the sisters] organize Female Relief Societies in the various wards." He added, "Some may think this is a trifling thing, but it is not."⁷

Later, President Joseph F. Smith said that in contrast to worldly organizations, which "are men-made, or women-made," the Relief Society "is divinely made, divinely authorized, divinely instituted, divinely ordained of God."⁸ President Joseph Fielding Smith told the sisters that they had "been given power and authority to do a great many things."⁹ He said, "You are members of the greatest women's organization in the world, an organization which is a vital part of the kingdom of God on [the] earth and which is so designed and operated that it helps its faithful members to gain eternal life in our Father's kingdom."¹⁰

An Extensive Sphere of Influence

Every year hundreds of thousands of women and young women become part of this ever-expanding "circle of sisters."¹¹ Thereafter, wherever a sister lives and wherever she serves, she retains her membership and association in Relief Society.¹² Because of Relief Society's important purposes, the First Presidency has expressed their desire that young women begin their preparation for Relief Society well before they are 18 years old.¹³

Relief Society is not a program. It is an official part of the Lord's Church that is "divinely ordained of God" to teach, strengthen, and inspire sisters in their purpose regarding faith, family, and relief. Relief Society is a way of life for Latter-day Saint women, and its influence extends far beyond a Sunday class or a social gathering. It follows the pattern of female disciples who served with the Lord Jesus Christ and His Apostles in His ancient Church.¹⁴ We have been taught that "it is as obligatory upon a woman to draw into her life the virtues that are fostered by the Relief Society as it is an obligation for the men to build into their lives the patterns of character fostered by the priesthood."¹⁵

When the Prophet Joseph Smith organized the Relief Society, he taught the sisters that they were to “relieve the poor” and “save souls.”¹⁶ In their charge to “save souls,” sisters were authorized to organize and participate in an extensive sphere of influence. The first Relief Society president was set apart to expound the scriptures, and Relief Society still carries an essential teaching responsibility in the Lord’s Church. When Joseph Smith told the sisters that the organization of Relief Society would prepare them for the “privileges, blessings and gifts of the Priesthood,”¹⁷ the Lord’s work of salvation was opened to them. Saving souls includes sharing the gospel and participating in missionary work. It includes engaging in temple and family history work. It includes doing everything possible to become spiritually and temporally self-reliant.

Elder John A. Widtsoe declared that Relief Society offers “relief of poverty, relief of illness; relief of doubt, relief of ignorance—relief of all that hinders the joy and progress of woman. What a magnificent commission!”¹⁸

President Boyd K. Packer has likened Relief Society to “a protecting wall.”¹⁹ The responsibility to protect sisters and their families increases the significance of the watchcare and ministering of visiting teachers, and it is a demonstration of our willingness to remember our covenants with the Lord. As “ministers to the needy and to the afflicted,” we work in harmony with bishops to look after the temporal and spiritual needs of the Saints.²⁰

President Spencer W. Kimball said: “There are many sisters who are living in rags—spiritual rags. They are entitled to gorgeous robes, spiritual robes. . . . It is your privilege to go into homes and exchange robes for rags.”²¹ President Harold B. Lee shared this vision. He said: “Cannot you see why the Lord has put it upon the . . . Relief Society to visit these homes? Because, next to the Master himself, there are none in [the] Church who have a more lovely touch, a more complete understanding of the hearts and the lives of these individuals.”²²

President Joseph F. Smith cautioned Relief Society sisters and their leaders, saying that he did not want “to see the time when our Relief Societies will follow, or commingle and lose their own

identity by mixing up with . . . woman-made organizations.” He expected the sisters “to lead the world and . . . especially the women of the world, in everything that is praise-worthy, everything that is God-like, everything that is uplifting and that is purifying to the children of men.”²³ His counsel emphasizes the charge to eliminate traditions, themes, fads, and trends and incorporate practices that are consistent with Relief Society purposes.

Leaders who seek revelation can ensure that every meeting, lesson, class, activity, and effort of the Relief Society fulfills the purposes for which it was organized. The sociality, friendship, and unity we desire will be the sweet results of serving together with the Lord in His work.

Fulfilling the Vision of Prophets

President Thomas S. Monson and his counselors recently testified “that the Lord has restored the fulness of the gospel through the Prophet Joseph Smith and that Relief Society is an important part of that restoration.” As evidence of their desire that the “glorious heritage” of Relief Society be preserved, the First Presidency recently published and distributed worldwide *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society*. Within the pages of this book, we can find patterns and examples of sisters and brothers working in partnership in families and the Church, and we can learn principles about who we are, what we believe, and what we should protect. We have been encouraged by the First Presidency to study this important book and “allow its timeless truths and inspiring examples to influence [our] lives.”²⁴

As sisters become more aligned with the purposes of Relief Society, the vision of the prophets will be fulfilled. President Kimball said, “There is a power in this organization [of Relief Society] that has not yet been fully exercised to strengthen the homes of Zion and build the Kingdom of God—nor will it until both the sisters and the priesthood catch the vision of Relief Society.”²⁵ He prophesied that “much of the major growth that is coming to the Church in the last days will come because many of the good women of the world (in whom there is often . . . an inner sense of spirituality) will be drawn to the Church in large

numbers. This will happen to the degree that the women of the Church . . . are seen as distinct and different—in happy ways—from the women of the world.”²⁶

I am grateful for the vision of prophets regarding Relief Society. I, like President Gordon B. Hinckley, “am convinced there is no other organization anywhere to match the Relief Society of this Church.”²⁷ It is our responsibility now to align ourselves with the vision of the prophets regarding Relief Society as we seek to increase faith, strengthen families, and provide relief.

I close with the words of President Lorenzo Snow: “The future of the [Relief] Society is full of promise. As the Church grows, its field of usefulness will be correspondingly enlarged, and it will be even more potent for good than it has been in the past.”²⁸ To sisters who help advance the kingdom of God, he said, “As you have shared in these labors, so you will most certainly share in the triumph of the work and in the exaltation and glory which the Lord will give to His faithful children.”²⁹ Of this vision I also bear testimony in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Julie B. Beck, “Fulfilling the Purpose of Relief Society,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2008, 108–11.
2. See Julie B. Beck, BYU Women’s Conference address (Apr. 29, 2011), http://ce.byu.edu/cw/womensconference/archive/2011/pdf/JulieB_openingS.pdf; “What I Hope My Granddaughters (and Grandsons) Will Understand about Relief Society,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 109–13; “Relief Society: A Sacred Work,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2009, 110–14.
3. See Julie B. Beck, “Why We Are Organized into Quorums and Relief Societies” (Brigham Young University devotional address, Jan. 17, 2012), speeches.byu.edu.
4. This message is not a comprehensive review of all prophetic statements regarding Relief Society. It is only a sample of their vision and direction.
5. Joseph Smith, in *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society*, conference reports, and other Church publications contain more teaching on this subject.
6. Joseph Smith, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 15.
7. Brigham Young, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 41.
8. Joseph F. Smith, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 65–66.
9. Joseph Fielding Smith, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 142.
10. Joseph Fielding Smith, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 97.
11. Boyd K. Packer, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 85.
12. See Boyd K. Packer, “The Circle of Sisters,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, 110.
13. See First Presidency letters, Mar. 19, 2003, and Feb. 23, 2007.

14. See *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 3–6.
15. Boyd K. Packer, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 16.
16. Joseph Smith, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 17.
17. Joseph Smith, in *History of the Church*, 4:602.
18. John A. Widtsoe, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 25.
19. Boyd K. Packer, *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, 110.
20. Joseph Fielding Smith, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 142.
21. Spencer W. Kimball, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 117.
22. Harold B. Lee, “The Place of Relief Society in the Welfare Plan,” *Relief Society Magazine*, Dec. 1946, 842.
23. Joseph F. Smith, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 66.
24. The First Presidency, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, ix.
25. Spencer W. Kimball, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 142.
26. Spencer W. Kimball, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 95.
27. Gordon B. Hinckley, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 160.
28. Lorenzo Snow, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 19.
29. Lorenzo Snow, in *Daughters in My Kingdom*, 7.

The Doctrine of Christ

By Elder D. Todd Christofferson

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

In the Church today, just as anciently, establishing the doctrine of Christ or correcting doctrinal deviations is a matter of divine revelation.

Our deepest gratitude and love to Sister Beck, Sister Allred, and Sister Thompson, and the Relief Society board.

We have seen of late a growing public interest in the beliefs of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This is something we welcome because, after all, our fundamental commission is to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ, His doctrine, in all the world (see Matthew 28:19–20; D&C 112:28). But we must admit there has been and still persists some confusion about our doctrine and how it is established. That is the subject I wish to address today.

The Savior taught His doctrine in the meridian of time, and His Apostles struggled mightily to preserve it against a barrage of false tradition and philosophy. New Testament Epistles cite numerous incidents demonstrating that serious and widespread apostasy was already under way during the Apostles' ministry.¹

The centuries that followed were illuminated by occasional rays of gospel light until, in the 19th century, a brilliant dawn of Restoration broke upon the world, and the gospel of Christ, full and complete, was once again upon the earth. This glorious day began when, in “a pillar of light . . . above the brightness of the sun” (Joseph Smith—History 1:16), God the Father and His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, visited young Joseph Smith and initiated what would become a virtual flood of revelation linked with divine power and authority.

In these revelations we find what might be termed the core doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ reestablished upon the

earth. Jesus Himself defined that doctrine in these words recorded in the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ:

“This is my doctrine, and it is the doctrine which the Father hath given unto me; and I bear record of the Father, and the Father beareth record of me, and the Holy Ghost beareth record of the Father and me; and I bear record that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me.

“And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God.

“And whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be damned.

“. . . And whoso believeth in me believeth in the Father also; and unto him will the Father bear record of me, for he will visit him with fire and with the Holy Ghost. . . .

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them” (3 Nephi 11:32–35, 39).

This is our message, the rock upon which we build, the foundation of everything else in the Church. Like all that comes from God, this doctrine is pure, it is clear, it is easy to understand—even for a child. With glad hearts, we invite all to receive it.

In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “we believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” (Articles of Faith 1:9). This is to say that while there is much we do not yet know, the truths and doctrine we have received have come and will continue to come by divine revelation. In some faith traditions, theologians claim equal teaching authority with the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and doctrinal matters may become a contest of opinions between them. Some rely on the ecumenical councils of the Middle Ages and their creeds. Others place primary emphasis on the reasoning of post-apostolic theologians or on biblical hermeneutics and exegesis. We value scholarship that enhances understanding, but in the Church today, just as anciently,

establishing the doctrine of Christ or correcting doctrinal deviations is a matter of divine revelation to those the Lord endows with apostolic authority.²

In 1954, President J. Reuben Clark Jr., then a counselor in the First Presidency, explained how doctrine is promulgated in the Church and the preeminent role of the President of the Church. Speaking of members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, he stated: “[We] should [bear] in mind that some of the General Authorities have had assigned to them a special calling; they possess a special gift; they are sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators, which gives them a special spiritual endowment in connection with their teaching of the people. They have the right, the power, and authority to declare the mind and will of God to his people, subject to the over-all power and authority of the President of the Church. Others of the General Authorities are not given this special spiritual endowment and authority covering their teaching; they have a resulting limitation, and the resulting limitation upon their power and authority in teaching applies to every other officer and member of the Church, for none of them is spiritually endowed as a prophet, seer, and revelator. Furthermore, as just indicated, the President of the Church has a further and special spiritual endowment in this respect, for he is the Prophet, Seer, and Revelator for the whole Church.”³

How does the Savior reveal His will and doctrine to prophets, seers, and revelators? He may act by messenger or in His own person. He may speak by His own voice or by the voice of the Holy Spirit—a communication of Spirit to spirit that may be expressed in words or in feelings that convey understanding beyond words (see 1 Nephi 17:45; D&C 9:8). He may direct Himself to His servants individually or acting in council (see 3 Nephi 27:1–8).

I cite two illustrations from the New Testament. The first was a revelation directed to the head of the Church. Early in the book of Acts, we find the Apostles of Christ declaring the gospel message only to Jews, following the pattern of Jesus’s ministry (see Matthew 15:24), but now, in the Lord’s timetable, the time had come for a change. In Joppa, Peter had a dream in which he

saw a variety of animals lowered to earth from heaven in “a great sheet knit at the four corners” (Acts 10:11) and was commanded to “kill, and eat” (Acts 10:13). Peter was reluctant since at least some of the animals were “unclean” under the law of Moses, and Peter had never violated the commandment against eating such. Nevertheless, the voice said to Peter in his dream, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (Acts 10:15).

The meaning of this dream became clear when soon afterward, several men sent from the Roman centurion Cornelius arrived at Peter’s lodging with a request that he come teach their master. Cornelius had gathered a sizable group of relatives and friends, and finding them expectantly waiting to receive his message, Peter said:

“God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. . . .

“ . . . Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

“But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:28, 34–35; see also verses 17–24).

“While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

“And they [who accompanied Peter] were astonished . . . because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

“ . . . Then answered Peter,

“Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?” (Acts 10:44–47).

By this experience and revelation to Peter, the Lord modified the practice of the Church and revealed a more complete doctrinal understanding to His disciples. And so the preaching of the gospel expanded to encompass all mankind.

Later in the book of Acts, we find another somewhat related illustration, this time showing how revelation on matters of doctrine may come in a council setting. A controversy arose about whether circumcision required under the law of Moses should carry over as a commandment in the gospel and Church of Christ (see Acts 15:1, 5). “And the apostles and elders came

together for to consider . . . this matter” (Acts 15:6). Our record of this council is certainly incomplete, but we are told that after “much disputing” (Acts 15:7), Peter, the senior Apostle, rose up and declared what the Holy Spirit had confirmed to him. He reminded the council that when the gospel began to be preached to the uncircumcised Gentiles in the house of Cornelius, they received the Holy Ghost just as had the circumcised Jewish converts. God, he said, “put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

“Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

“But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they” (Acts 15:9–11; see also verse 8).

After Paul, Barnabas, and perhaps others spoke in support of Peter’s declaration, James moved that the decision be implemented by letter to the Church, and the council was united “with one accord” (Acts 15:25; see also verses 12–23). In the letter announcing their decision, the Apostles said, “It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us” (Acts 15:28), or in other words, this decision came by divine revelation through the Holy Spirit.

These same patterns are followed today in the restored Church of Jesus Christ. The President of the Church may announce or interpret doctrines based on revelation to him (see, for example, D&C 138). Doctrinal exposition may also come through the combined council of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (see, for example, Official Declaration 2). Council deliberations will often include a weighing of canonized scriptures, the teachings of Church leaders, and past practice. But in the end, just as in the New Testament Church, the objective is not simply consensus among council members but revelation from God. It is a process involving both reason and faith for obtaining the mind and will of the Lord.⁴

At the same time it should be remembered that not every statement made by a Church leader, past or present, necessarily constitutes doctrine. It is commonly understood in the Church

that a statement made by one leader on a single occasion often represents a personal, though well-considered, opinion, not meant to be official or binding for the whole Church. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “a prophet [is] a prophet only when he [is] acting as such.”⁵ President Clark, quoted earlier, observed:

“To this point runs a simple story my father told me as a boy, I do not know on what authority, but it illustrates the point. His story was that during the excitement incident to the coming of [Johnston’s] Army, Brother Brigham preached to the people in a morning meeting a sermon vibrant with defiance to the approaching army, and declaring an intention to oppose and drive them back. In the afternoon meeting he arose and said that Brigham Young had been talking in the morning, but the Lord was going to talk now. He then delivered an address, the tempo of which was the opposite from the morning talk. . . .

“. . . The Church will know by the testimony of the Holy Ghost in the body of the members, whether the brethren in voicing their views are ‘moved upon by the Holy Ghost’; and in due time that knowledge will be made manifest.”⁶

The Prophet Joseph Smith confirmed the Savior’s central role in our doctrine in one definitive sentence: “The fundamental principles of our religion are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.”⁷ Joseph Smith’s testimony of Jesus is that He lives, “for [he] saw him, even on the right hand of God; and [he] heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father” (D&C 76:23; see also verse 22). I appeal to all who hear or read this message to seek through prayer and study of the scriptures that same witness of the divine character, the Atonement, and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Accept His doctrine by repenting, being baptized, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and then throughout your life following the laws and covenants of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As our Easter celebration approaches, I express my own witness that Jesus of Nazareth was and is the Son of God, the very Messiah of ancient prophecy. He is the Christ, who suffered

in Gethsemane, died on the cross, was buried, and who indeed rose again the third day. He is the resurrected Lord, through whom we shall all be resurrected and by whom all who will may be redeemed and exalted in His heavenly kingdom. This is our doctrine, confirming all prior testaments of Jesus Christ and stated anew for our own time. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Neal A. Maxwell, "From the Beginning," *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 18–19:

"James decried 'wars and fightings among' the Church (James 4:1). Paul lamented 'divisions' in the Church and how 'grievous wolves' would not spare 'the flock' (1 Cor. 11:18; Acts 20:29–31). He knew an apostasy was coming and wrote to the Thessalonians that Jesus' second coming would not occur 'except there come a falling away first'; further advising that 'iniquity doth already work' (2 Thes. 2:3, 7).

"Near the end, Paul acknowledged how very extensive the falling away was: 'All they which are in Asia be turned away from me' (2 Tim. 1:15) . . .

"Widespread fornication and idolatry brought apostolic alarm (see 1 Cor. 5:9; Eph. 5:3; Jude 1:7). John and Paul both bemoaned the rise of false Apostles (see 2 Cor. 11:13; Rev. 2:2). The Church was clearly under siege. Some not only fell away but then openly opposed. In one circumstance, Paul stood alone and lamented that 'all men forsook me' (2 Tim. 4:16). He also decried those who 'subvert[ed] whole houses' (Titus 1:11).

"Some local leaders rebelled, as when one, who loved his preeminence, refused to receive the brethren (see 3 Jn. 1:9–10).

"No wonder President Brigham Young observed: 'It is said the

Priesthood was taken from the Church, but it is not so, the Church went from the Priesthood' (in *Journal of Discourses*, 12:69)."

In the course of time, as Elder Maxwell expressed it, "reason, the Greek philosophical tradition, dominated, then supplanted, reliance on revelation, an outcome probably hastened by well-intentioned Christians wishing to bring their beliefs into the mainstream of contemporary culture. . . .

". . . Let us [too] be wary about accommodating revealed theology to conventional wisdom" (*Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 19–20).

2. Apostles and prophets such as Joseph Smith declare God's word, but in addition, we believe men and women generally and even children can learn from and be guided by divine inspiration in response to prayer and study of the scriptures. Just as in the days of the ancient Apostles, members of the Church of Jesus Christ are given the gift of the Holy Ghost, which facilitates an ongoing communication with their Heavenly Father, or, in other words, personal revelation (see Acts 2:37–38). In this way, the Church becomes a body of committed, spiritually mature individuals whose faith is not blind but seeing—informed and confirmed by the Holy Spirit. This is not to say that every member

speaks for the Church or can define its doctrines but that each can receive divine guidance in dealing with the challenges and opportunities of his or her life.

3. J. Reuben Clark Jr., "When Are Church Leaders' Words Entitled to Claim of Scripture?" *Church News*, July 31, 1954, 9–10; see also Doctrine and Covenants 28:1–2, 6–7, 11–13.
4. The required preparation and qualifications for council participants are "righteousness, . . . holiness, and lowliness of heart, meekness and long suffering, . . . faith, and virtue, and knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity; "Because the promise is, if these things abound in them they shall not be unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord" (Doctrine and Covenants 107:30–31).
5. Joseph Smith, in *History of the Church*, 5:265.
6. J. Reuben Clark Jr., "Church Leaders' Words," 10. Of the story his father told him about Brigham Young, President Clark further wrote:

"I do not know if this ever happened, but I say it illustrates a

principle—that even the President of the Church, himself, may not always be 'moved upon by the Holy Ghost,' when he addresses the people. This has happened about matters of doctrine (usually of a highly speculative character) where subsequent Presidents of the Church and the peoples themselves have felt that in declaring the doctrine, the announcer was not 'moved upon by the Holy Ghost.'

"How shall the Church know when these adventurous expeditions of the brethren into these highly speculative principles and doctrines meet the requirements of the statutes that the announcers thereof have been 'moved upon by the Holy Ghost'? The Church will know by the testimony of the Holy Ghost in the body of the members, whether the brethren in voicing their views are 'moved upon by the Holy Ghost'; and in due time that knowledge will be made manifest" ("Church Leaders' Words," 10).

7. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 49.

The Race of Life

By President Thomas S. Monson

Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where do we go after this life? No longer need these universal questions remain unanswered.

My beloved brothers and sisters, this morning I wish to speak to you of eternal truths—those truths which will enrich our lives and see us safely home.

Everywhere people are in a hurry. Jet-powered aircraft speed their precious human cargo across broad continents and vast oceans so that business meetings might be attended, obligations met, vacations enjoyed, or families visited. Roadways everywhere—including freeways, thruways, and motorways—carry millions of automobiles, occupied by more millions of people, in a seemingly endless stream and for a multitude of reasons as we rush about the business of each day.

In this fast-paced life, do we ever pause for moments of meditation—even thoughts of timeless truths?

When compared to eternal verities, most of the questions and concerns of daily living are really rather trivial. What should we have for dinner? What color should we paint the living room? Should we sign Johnny up for soccer? These questions and countless others like them lose their significance when times of crisis arise, when loved ones are hurt or injured, when sickness enters the house of good health, when life's candle dims and darkness threatens. Our thoughts become focused, and we are easily able to determine what is really important and what is merely trivial.

I recently visited with a woman who has been battling a life-threatening disease for over two years. She indicated that prior to her illness, her days were filled with activities such as cleaning her house to perfection and filling it with beautiful furnishings. She visited her hairdresser twice a week and spent money and time each month adding to her wardrobe. Her grandchildren were invited to visit infrequently, for she was always concerned that what she considered her precious possessions might be broken or otherwise ruined by tiny and careless hands.

And then she received the shocking news that her mortal life was in jeopardy and that she might have very limited time left here. She said that at the moment she heard the doctor's diagnosis, she knew immediately that she would spend whatever time she had remaining with her family and friends and with the gospel at the center of her life, for these represented what was most precious to her.

Such moments of clarity come to all of us at one time or another, although not always through so dramatic a circumstance. We see clearly what it is that really matters in our lives and how we should be living.

Said the Savior:

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

"But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."¹

In our times of deepest reflection or greatest need, the soul of man reaches heavenward, seeking a divine response to life's greatest questions: *Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where do we go after we leave this life?*

Answers to these questions are not discovered within the covers of academia's textbooks or by checking the Internet. These questions transcend mortality. They embrace eternity.

Where did we come from? This query is inevitably thought, if not spoken, by every human being.

The Apostle Paul told the Athenians on Mars' Hill that "we are the offspring of God."² Since we know that our physical bodies are the offspring of our mortal parents, we must probe for the meaning of Paul's statement. The Lord has declared that "the spirit and the body are the soul of man."³ Thus it is the spirit which is the offspring of God. The writer of Hebrews refers to Him as "the Father of spirits."⁴ The spirits of all men are literally His "begotten sons and daughters."⁵

We note that inspired poets have, for our contemplation of this subject, written moving messages and recorded transcendent thoughts. William Wordsworth penned the truth:

*Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!*⁶

Parents ponder their responsibility to teach, to inspire, and to provide guidance, direction, and example. And while parents ponder, children—and particularly youth—ask the penetrating question, why are we here? Usually it is spoken silently to the soul and phrased, why am *I* here?

How grateful we should be that a wise Creator fashioned an earth and placed us here, with a veil of forgetfulness of our previous existence so that we might experience a time of testing, an opportunity to prove ourselves in order to qualify for all that God has prepared for us to receive.

Clearly, one primary purpose of our existence upon the earth is to obtain a body of flesh and bones. We have also been given the gift of agency. In a thousand ways we are privileged to choose for ourselves. Here we learn from the hard taskmaster of experience. We discern between good and evil. We differentiate as to the bitter and the sweet. We discover that there are consequences attached to our actions.

By obedience to God's commandments, we can qualify for that "house" spoken of by Jesus when He declared: "In my Father's house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you . . . that where I am, there ye may be also."⁷

Although we come into mortality "trailing clouds of glory," life moves relentlessly forward. Youth follows childhood, and maturity comes ever so imperceptibly. From experience we learn the need to reach heavenward for assistance as we make our way along life's pathway.

God, our Father, and Jesus Christ, our Lord, have marked the way to perfection. They beckon us to follow eternal verities and to become perfect, as They are perfect.⁸

The Apostle Paul likened life to a race. To the Hebrews he urged, "Let us lay aside . . . the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."⁹

In our zeal, let us not overlook the sage counsel from Ecclesiastes: "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong."¹⁰ Actually, the prize belongs to him or her who endures to the end.

When I reflect on the race of life, I remember another type of race, even from childhood days. My friends and I would take pocketknives in hand and, from the soft wood of a willow tree, fashion small toy boats. With a triangular-shaped cotton sail in place, each would launch his crude craft in the race down the relatively turbulent waters of Utah's Provo River. We would run along the river's bank and watch the tiny vessels sometimes bobbing violently in the swift current and at other times sailing serenely as the water deepened.

During a particular race we noted that one boat led all the rest toward the appointed finish line. Suddenly, the current carried it too close to a large whirlpool, and the boat heaved to its side and capsized. Around and around it was carried, unable to make its way back into the main current. At last it came to an uneasy rest amid the flotsam and jetsam that surrounded it, held fast by the tentacles of the grasping green moss.

The toy boats of childhood had no keel for stability, no rudder to provide direction, and no source of power. Inevitably, their destination was downstream—the path of least resistance.

Unlike toy boats, we have been provided divine attributes to guide our journey. We enter mortality not to float with the moving currents of life but with the power to think, to reason, and to achieve.

Our Heavenly Father did not launch us on our eternal voyage without providing the means whereby we could receive from Him guidance to ensure our safe return. I speak of prayer. I speak too of the whisperings from that still, small voice; and I do not overlook the holy scriptures, which contain the word of the Lord and the words of the prophets—provided to us to help us successfully cross the finish line.

At some period in our mortal mission, there appears the faltering step, the wan smile, the pain of sickness—even the fading of summer, the approach of autumn, the chill of winter, and the experience we call death.

Every thoughtful person has asked himself the question best phrased by Job of old: “If a man die, shall he live again?”¹¹ Try as we might to put the question out of our thoughts, it always returns. Death comes to all mankind. It comes to the aged as they walk on faltering feet. Its summons is heard by those who have scarcely reached midway in life’s journey. At times it hushes the laughter of little children.

But what of an existence beyond death? Is death the end of all? Robert Blatchford, in his book *God and My Neighbor*, attacked with vigor accepted Christian beliefs such as God, Christ, prayer, and particularly immortality. He boldly asserted that death was the end of our existence and that no one could prove otherwise. Then a surprising thing happened. His wall of skepticism suddenly crumbled to dust. He was left exposed and undefended. Slowly he began to feel his way back to the faith he had ridiculed and abandoned. What had caused this profound change in his outlook? His wife died. With a broken heart he went into the room where lay all that was mortal of her. He looked again at the face he loved so well. Coming out, he said to a friend: “It is she, and yet it is not she. Everything is changed. Something that was there before is taken away. She is not the same. What can be gone if it be not the soul?”

Later he wrote: “Death is not what some people imagine. It is only like going into another room. In that other room we shall find . . . the dear women and men and the sweet children we have loved and lost.”¹²

My brothers and sisters, we know that death is not the end. This truth has been taught by living prophets throughout the ages. It is also found in our holy scriptures. In the Book of Mormon we read specific and comforting words:

“Now, concerning the state of the soul between death and the resurrection—Behold, it has been made known unto me by an angel, that the spirits of all men, as soon as they are departed from this mortal body, yea, the spirits of all men, whether they be good or evil, are taken home to that God who gave them life.

“And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise, a state of rest, a state of peace, where they shall rest from all their troubles and from all care, and sorrow.”¹³

After the Savior was crucified and His body had lain in the tomb for three days, the spirit again entered. The stone was rolled away, and the resurrected Redeemer walked forth, clothed with an immortal body of flesh and bones.

The answer to Job’s question, “If a man die, shall he live again?” came when Mary and others approached the tomb and saw two men in shining garments who spoke to them: “Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen.”¹⁴

As the result of Christ’s victory over the grave, we shall all be resurrected. This is the redemption of the soul. Paul wrote: “There are . . . celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.”¹⁵

It is the celestial glory which we seek. It is in the presence of God we desire to dwell. It is a forever family in which we want membership. Such blessings are earned through a lifetime of striving, seeking, repenting, and finally succeeding.

Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where do we go after this life? No longer need these universal questions remain unanswered. From the very depths of my soul and in all humility, I testify that those things of which I have spoken are true.

Our Heavenly Father rejoices for those who keep His commandments. He is concerned also for the lost child, the tardy teenager, the wayward youth, the delinquent parent. Tenderly the Master speaks to these and indeed to all: “Come back. Come up. Come in. Come home. Come unto me.”

In one week we will celebrate Easter. Our thoughts will turn to the Savior’s life, His death, and His Resurrection. As His special witness, I testify to you that He lives and that He awaits our triumphant return. That such a return will be ours, I pray humbly in His holy name—even Jesus Christ, our Savior and our Redeemer, amen.

Notes

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Matthew 6:19–21. 2. Acts 17:29. 3. Doctrine and Covenants 88:15. 4. Hebrews 12:9. 5. Doctrine and Covenants 76:24. 6. William Wordsworth, <i>Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood</i> (1884), 23–24. 7. John 14:2–3. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. See Matthew 5:48; 3 Nephi 12:48. 9. Hebrews 12:1. 10. Ecclesiastes 9:11. 11. Job 14:14. 12. See Robert Blatchford, <i>More Things in Heaven and Earth: Adventures in Quest of a Soul</i> (1925), 11. 13. Alma 40:11–12. 14. Luke 24:5–6. 15. 1 Corinthians 15:40. |
|--|---|

The Power of Deliverance

By Elder L. Tom Perry

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

We can be delivered from the ways of evil and wickedness by turning to the teachings of the holy scriptures.

I have a very good friend who sends me a new tie to wear during the session I speak at each general conference. He has excellent taste, don't you think?

My young friend has some difficult challenges. They limit him in some ways, but in other ways he is extraordinary. For example, his boldness as a missionary rivals the sons of Mosiah. The simplicity of his beliefs makes his convictions incredibly firm and steady. I believe that in Scott's mind it's unimaginable that everyone isn't a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and that everyone hasn't read the Book of Mormon and doesn't have a testimony of its truthfulness.

Let me tell you of an event in Scott's life when he was making his first airplane flight alone to visit his brother. A neighbor who was seated nearby overheard Scott's conversation with the person next to him:

"Hello, my name is Scott. What is yours?"

His seatmate shared his name.

"What do you do?"

"I am an engineer."

"That's nice. Where do you live?"

"In Las Vegas."

"We have a temple there. Do you know where the Mormon temple is?"

"Yes. It is a beautiful building."

“Are you a Mormon?”

“No.”

“Well, you should be. It is a great religion. Have you read the Book of Mormon?”

“No.”

“Well, you should. It’s a great book.”

I agree wholeheartedly with Scott—the Book of Mormon is a great book. The words of the Prophet Joseph Smith cited on the introduction page of the Book of Mormon have always resonated with me: “I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.”

This year in our Sunday School classes, we are studying the Book of Mormon. As we prepare and participate, may we be motivated to follow Scott’s bold example to share our love of this special scripture with others not of our faith.

A dominant theme of the Book of Mormon is expressed in the final verse of the first chapter of 1 Nephi. Nephi writes, “But behold, I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance” (1 Nephi 1:20).

I wish to speak about how the Book of Mormon, which is a tender mercy of the Lord preserved for these latter days, delivers us by teaching us in a pure and “most correct” way the doctrine of Christ.

Many of the stories of the Book of Mormon are stories of deliverance. Lehi’s departure into the wilderness with his family was about deliverance from the destruction of Jerusalem. The story of the Jaredites is a story of deliverance, as is the story of the Mulekites. Alma the Younger was delivered from sin. Helaman’s stripling warriors were delivered in battle. Nephi and Lehi were delivered from prison. The theme of deliverance is evident throughout the entire Book of Mormon.

There are two stories in the Book of Mormon which are very similar and teach an important lesson. The first is from the book of Mosiah, starting with the 19th chapter. Here we learn of King

Limhi living in the land of Nephi. The Lamanites had waged war against the people of Limhi. The result of the war was that the Lamanites would allow King Limhi to rule over his own people, but they would be in bondage to them. It was a very uneasy peace. (See Mosiah 19–20.)

When Limhi's people had their fill of Lamanite abuses, they convinced their king to go against the Lamanites in battle. Three times Limhi's people were defeated. Heavy burdens were laid upon them. Finally they humbled themselves and cried mightily unto the Lord that He would deliver them. (See Mosiah 21:1–14.) Verse 15 of chapter 21 tells us of the Lord's response: "And now the Lord was slow to hear their cry because of their iniquities; nevertheless the Lord did hear their cries, and began to soften the hearts of the Lamanites that they began to ease their burdens; yet the Lord did not see fit to deliver them out of bondage."

Soon after, Ammon and a small band of men from Zarahemla arrived, and with Gideon—one of the leaders of Limhi's people—they worked out a plan which was successful, and they escaped from the Lamanite abuses. The Lord was slow to hear their cries. Why? Because of their iniquities.

The second story is similar in many respects but also different. The account is recorded in Mosiah 24.

Alma and his people had settled in the land of Helam, when an army of the Lamanites came into the borders of the land. They met and worked out a peaceful solution. (See Mosiah 23:25–29.) Soon the leaders of the Lamanites began to impose their will on the people of Alma and placed heavy burdens on them to bear (see Mosiah 24:8). In verse 13 we read, "And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came to them in their afflictions, saying: Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me; and I will covenant with my people and deliver them out of bondage."

The people of Alma were delivered from the hands of the Lamanites and safely made their way back to be united with the people of Zarahemla.

What was the difference between the people of Alma and the people of King Limhi? Obviously, there were several differences: the people of Alma were peaceful and more righteous; they had

already been baptized and entered into a covenant with the Lord; they humbled themselves before the Lord even before their tribulations started. All these differences made it appropriate and fair that the Lord would deliver them quickly in a miraculous way from the hand which kept them in bondage. These scriptures teach us of the Lord's power of deliverance.

Prophecies foretelling the life and mission of Jesus Christ promise us the deliverance that He will provide. His Atonement and Resurrection provide all of us an escape from physical death and, if we repent, an escape from spiritual death, bringing with it the blessings of eternal life. The promises of the Atonement and Resurrection, the promises of deliverance from physical and spiritual death, were declared by God to Moses when He said, "For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39).

In contrast to the beautifully designed beliefs for us in the holy scriptures, we find the opposing forces of secularism engaged in challenging the long-standing beliefs in the holy writings—writings which have given us guidance through these many centuries in defining the eternal values and standards for our conduct through life. They declare that the teachings in the Bible are false and the teachings of the Master out of date. Their voices cry that each person must have the freedom to set his or her own standards; they attempt to alter the rights of the believers, contrary to that which is taught in the scriptures and in the words of the prophets.

What a blessing it is to have the account of the mission of our Lord and Savior declared in the Book of Mormon to add a second witness to the doctrine declared in the Bible. Why is it important for the world to have both the Bible and the Book of Mormon? I believe the answer is found in the 13th chapter of 1 Nephi. Nephi records: "And the angel spake unto me, saying: These last records, which thou hast seen among the Gentiles [the Book of Mormon], shall establish the truth of the first [the Bible], which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, and shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them; and shall make known to all kindreds, tongues, and people, that the Lamb of God is the Son of the Eternal Father, and

the Savior of the world; and that all men must come unto him, or they cannot be saved" (verse 40).

Neither the Bible nor the Book of Mormon in and of themselves is sufficient. Both are necessary for us to teach and learn about the full and complete doctrine of Christ. The need for the other does not diminish either one of them. Both the Bible and the Book of Mormon are necessary for our salvation and exaltation. As President Ezra Taft Benson so powerfully taught, "When used together, the Bible and the Book of Mormon confound false doctrines" ("A New Witness for Christ," *Ensign*, Nov. 1984, 8).

I want to close by noting two stories—one from the Old Testament, the other from the Book of Mormon—to show how the books work harmoniously together.

The story of Abraham begins with his deliverance from the idol-worshipping Chaldeans (see Genesis 11:27–31; Abraham 2:1–4). He and his wife Sarah were later delivered from their sorrow and promised that through their posterity all the nations of the earth would be blessed (see Genesis 18:18).

The Old Testament contains the account of Abraham taking Lot, his nephew, with him out of Egypt. Given a choice of land, Lot chose the plain of Jordan, and he pitched his tent facing Sodom, a city of great wickedness. (See Genesis 13:1–12.) Most of the problems that Lot later encountered in his life, and there were several, can be traced back to his early decision to position the door of his tent to look upon Sodom.

Abraham, the father of the faithful, experienced life differently. Certainly there were many challenges, but it was to be a blessed life. We do not know which way Abraham's tent door faced, but there's a strong hint in the last verse of the 13th chapter of Genesis. It reports, "Then Abram [or Abraham] removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord" (Genesis 13:18).

While I do not know, I personally believe the door of Abraham's tent faced the altar he built unto the Lord. How do I draw this conclusion? It is because I know the Book of Mormon story about King Benjamin's instructions to his people when they gathered to hear his final address. King Benjamin instructed them

to position the doors of their tents facing the temple (see Mosiah 2:1–6).

We can be delivered from the ways of evil and wickedness by turning to the teachings of the holy scriptures. The Savior is the Great Deliverer, for He delivers us from death and from sin (see Romans 11:26; 2 Nephi 9:12).

I declare that Jesus is the Christ and that we can draw close to Him by reading the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon is another testament of Jesus Christ. The first testaments of our Savior are the Old and New Testaments—or the Bible.

Again, let's remember my friend Scott's description of the Book of Mormon: "It's a great book." I testify to you that much of the Book of Mormon's greatness stems from its harmony with the Holy Bible, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

That the Lost May Be Found

By Elder M. Russell Ballard

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

As you seek to live the gospel and doctrine of Christ, the Holy Ghost will guide you and your family.

Brothers and sisters, according to the scriptures, the Liahona was “a round ball of curious workmanship” featuring two spindles, one of which pointed the way Father Lehi’s family should go into the wilderness (1 Nephi 16:10).

I think I know why Lehi was greatly astonished when he first saw it, because I remember my reaction when I first saw and witnessed a GPS unit. In my mind it was a modern-day device “of curious workmanship.” Somehow, in some way I can’t even imagine, this little device, right in my phone, can pinpoint exactly where I am and tell me exactly how to get where I want to go.

For both my wife, Barbara, and me, the GPS is a blessing. For Barbara it means she doesn’t have to tell me to stop and ask for directions; and for me it means I can be right when I say, “I don’t need to ask anyone. I know exactly where I’m going.”

Now, brothers and sisters, we have available to us a tool even more remarkable than the best GPS. Everyone loses his or her way at some point, to some degree. It is through the promptings of the Holy Ghost that we can be brought safely back onto the right path, and it is the atoning sacrifice of the Savior that can return us home.

Being lost can apply to whole societies as well as to individuals. Today we live in a time when much of this world has lost its way, particularly with regard to values and priorities within our homes.

One hundred years ago, President Joseph F. Smith connected happiness directly to the family and admonished us to focus our efforts there. He said: "There can be no genuine happiness separate and apart from the home. . . . There is no happiness without service, and there is no service greater than that which converts the home into a divine institution, and which promotes and preserves family life. . . . The home is what needs reforming" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* [1998], 382, 384).

It is our homes and families that need reforming in this increasingly materialistic and secular world. A stunning example is the growing disregard for marriage here in the United States. Earlier this year the *New York Times* reported that "the share of children born to unmarried women has crossed a threshold: more than half of births to American women under 30 occur outside marriage" (Jason DeParle and Sabrina Tavernise, "Unwed Mothers Now a Majority Before Age of 30," *New York Times*, Feb. 18, 2012, A1).

We also know that among couples in the United States who do marry, nearly half get divorced. Even those who stay married often lose their way by letting other things interfere with their family relationships.

Equally worrisome is the ever-growing gap between the rich and poor and between those who strive to preserve family values and commitments and those who have given up on doing so. Statistically, those who have less education and consequently lower incomes are less likely to marry and to go to church and much more likely to be involved in crime and to have children outside of marriage. And these trends are also troubling in much of the rest of the world. (See W. Bradford Wilcox and others, "No Money, No Honey, No Church: The Deinstitutionalization of Religious Life among the White Working Class," available at www.virginia.edu/marriageproject/pdfs/Religion_WorkingPaper.pdf.)

Opposite of what many had thought, prosperity and education seem to be connected to a higher likelihood of having traditional families and values.

The real question, of course, is about *cause* and *effect*. Do some sectors of our society have stronger values and families *because* they are more educated and prosperous, or are they more educated and prosperous *because* they have values and strong families? In this worldwide Church we know that it is the latter. When people make family and religious commitments to gospel principles, they begin to do better spiritually and often temporally as well.

And, of course, societies at large are strengthened as families grow stronger. Commitments to family and values are the basic *cause*. Nearly everything else is *effect*. When couples marry and make commitments to each other, they greatly increase their chances of economic well-being. When children are born in wedlock and have both a mom and a dad, their opportunities and their likelihood of occupational success skyrocket. And when families work and play together, neighborhoods and communities flourish, economies improve, and less government and fewer costly safety nets are required.

So the bad news is that family breakdown is causing a host of societal and economic ills. But the good news is that, like any cause and effect, those ills can be reversed if what is causing them is changed. Inequities are resolved by living correct principles and values. Brothers and sisters, the most important *cause* of our lifetime is our families. If we will devote ourselves to this cause, we will improve every other aspect of our lives and will become, as a people and as a church, an example and a beacon for all peoples of the earth.

But this is not easy in a world where hearts are turning in many directions and where the whole planet seems to be constantly moving and changing at a pace never before imagined. Nothing stays the same for long. Styles, trends, fads, political correctness, and even perceptions of right and wrong shift and move. As the prophet Isaiah predicted, wrong is portrayed as right and right as wrong (see Isaiah 5:20).

The spiritual divide gets even wider as evil becomes ever more deceptive and subtle and pulls people toward it like a dark magnet—even as the gospel of truth and light attracts the honest

in heart and the honorable of the earth, who seek what is moral and good.

We may be relatively small in number, but as members of this Church we can reach across these widening gaps. We know the power of Christ-centered service that brings together God's children regardless of their spiritual or their economic status. One year ago the First Presidency invited us to participate in a day of service celebrating 75 years of the welfare program, which helps people to become more self-sufficient. Millions of hours were contributed by our members all around the world.

The Church is a mooring in this tempestuous sea, an anchor in the churning waters of change and division, and a beacon to those who value and seek righteousness. The Lord uses this Church as a tool in pulling His children throughout the world toward the protection of His gospel.

The Spirit of Elijah, which has no boundaries, is also a great power in the Lord's purposes for the eternal destiny of His children. In Malachi's words, the Spirit of the Holy Ghost turns "the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers" (Malachi 4:6).

The Church stands as an example of heart turning and as a catalyst for good in the world. Among Church members who are married in the temple and who regularly attend Sunday meetings, the divorce rate is significantly less than that of the world, and families remain closer and are in more frequent communication. The health in our families is better, and we live several years longer than the population average. We contribute more financial resources and more service per capita to those in need, and we are more likely to seek higher education. I point out these things not to boast but to testify that life is better (and much happier) as hearts turn toward family and as families live in the light of the gospel of Christ.

So what can we do to not become lost? First, may I suggest that we *prioritize*. Put everything you do outside the home in subjection to and in support of what happens inside your home. Remember President Harold B. Lee's counsel that "the most important . . . work you will ever do will be within the walls of your own homes" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B.*

Lee [2000], 134) and President David O. McKay's timeless "No other success can compensate for failure in the home" (quoted from J. E. McCulloch, *Home: The Savior of Civilization* [1924], 42; in Conference Report, Apr. 1935, 116).

Organize your personal lives to provide time for prayer and scriptures and family activity. Give your children responsibilities in the home that will teach them how to work. Teach them that living the gospel will lead them away from the filth, promiscuity, and violence of the Internet, media, and video games. They will not be lost, and they will be prepared to handle responsibility when it is thrust upon them.

Second, we need to do things in the *right order!* Marriage first and then family. Too many in the world have forgotten this natural order of things and think they can change it or even reverse it. Remove any of your fear with faith. Trust the power of God to guide you.

To you who are not yet married, pay careful attention to finding your eternal companion. Young men, remember something else that President Joseph F. Smith said: "Bachelorhood . . . [carries] to the superficial mind the idea that [it is] desirable because [it brings] with [it] the minimum of responsibility. . . . The real fault lies with the young men. The license of the age leads them from paths of duty and responsibility. . . . Their sisters are the victims . . . [and] would marry if they could, and would accept cheerfully the responsibilities of family life" (*Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. [1939], 281).

And to you young women, I would add that you must also not lose sight of this responsibility. No career can bring you as much fulfillment as rearing a family. And when you are my age, you will realize this even more.

Third, husbands and wives, you should be *equal partners* in your marriage. Read often and understand the proclamation on the family and follow it. Avoid unrighteous dominion in any form. No one owns a spouse or children; God is the Father of us all and has extended to us the privilege of our own family, which was previously only His, to help us become more like Him. As His children we should learn at home to love God and to know

that we can ask Him for the help we need. Everyone, married or single, can be happy and supportive within whatever family you may have.

And finally, use the *family resources* of the Church. In raising children, families can draw upon the help of the ward. Support and work in tandem with priesthood and auxiliary leaders, and take full advantage of the Church's youth and family programs. Remember another of President Lee's insightful phrases—that the Church is the scaffolding with which we build eternal families (see *Teachings: Harold B. Lee*, 148).

Now, if for any reason you individually or as a family have lost your way, then you need only apply the Savior's teachings from Luke, chapter 15, to correct your course. Here the Savior tells of the effort of a shepherd searching for his lost sheep, of a woman searching for a lost coin, and of the welcome received by the prodigal son returning home. Why did Jesus teach these parables? He wanted us to know that none of us will ever be so lost that we cannot find our way again through His Atonement and His teachings.

As you seek to live the gospel and doctrine of Christ, the Holy Ghost will guide you and your family. You will have a spiritual GPS to tell you always where you are and where you are going. I bear witness that the resurrected Redeemer of mankind loves all of us, and He has promised if we will follow Him, He will lead us safely back into the presence of our Heavenly Father, of which I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Having the Vision to Do

By Elder O. Vincent Haleck

Of the Seventy

If we are to prosper rather than perish, we must gain a vision of ourselves as the Savior sees us.

Like all good parents, my own parents desired a bright future for their children. My father was not a member, and because of unusual circumstances that existed at that time, my parents determined that my brothers and sisters and I should leave our island home of American Samoa, in the South Pacific, and travel to the United States in order to go to school.

The decision to be separated from us was a difficult one for my parents, especially my mother. They knew that there would be unknown challenges as we were put into new surroundings. However, with faith and determination, they pressed forward with their plan.

Because of her Latter-day Saint upbringing, my mother was familiar with the principles of fasting and prayer, and both of my parents felt that they needed the blessings of heaven to help their children. In that spirit they began to set aside a day every week to fast and pray for us. Their vision was to prepare their children for a bright future. They acted on this vision as they exercised their faith by seeking the Lord's blessings. Through fasting and prayer, they received the assurance, comfort, and peace that all would be well.

How do we, amidst the challenges of our lives, gain the vision necessary to do those things that will bring us closer to the Savior? Speaking of vision, the book of Proverbs teaches this truth: "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18). If we are to prosper rather than perish, we must gain a vision of ourselves as the Savior sees us.

The Savior saw more in those humble fishermen whom He called to follow Him than they initially saw in themselves; He saw a vision of who they could become. He knew of their goodness and potential, and He acted to call them. They were not experienced at first, but as they followed, they saw His example, felt His teachings, and became His disciples. There was a time when some of His disciples departed from Him because the things that they heard were hard for them. Aware that others might also depart, Jesus inquired of the Twelve, "Will ye also go away?" (John 6:67). Peter's response reflects how he had changed and had caught the vision of who the Savior was. "To whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68), he responded.

With that vision these faithful and devoted disciples were able to do hard things as they traveled to preach the gospel and establish the Church after the Savior had departed. Eventually, some of them made the ultimate sacrifice for their testimonies.

There are other examples in the scriptures of those who caught the vision of the gospel and then went out to act upon that vision. The prophet Alma gained his vision when he heard Abinadi boldly teaching and testifying before King Noah. Alma acted on Abinadi's teachings and went about teaching the things he had learned, baptizing many who believed on his words (see Mosiah 17:1–4; 18:1–16). While persecuting the early Saints, the Apostle Paul was converted on the road to Damascus and then acted by teaching and testifying of Christ (see Acts 9:1–6, 20–22, 29).

In our own day many young men, women, and senior couples have answered the call of a prophet of God to serve missions. With faith and courage they leave their homes and everything that is familiar to them because of their faith in the great good they can do as missionaries. As they act on their vision to serve, they bless the lives of many and, in the process, change their own lives. In the last general conference, President Thomas S. Monson thanked us for the service we give to one another and reminded us of our responsibility to be God's hands in blessing His children here on earth (see "Until We Meet Again," *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 108). The fulfillment of

this charge has been heartwarming as members of the Church have acted upon his vision.

Before the Savior departed, understanding that we would need help, He said, "I will not leave you comfortless" (John 14:18). He taught His disciples, "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26). This is the same Holy Ghost who can empower and motivate us to do the things that the Savior and our modern-day prophets and apostles teach.

As we put into action the teachings of our leaders, we gain a deeper understanding of our Savior's vision for us. Throughout this conference we have received inspired counsel from prophets and apostles. Study their teachings and ponder them in your hearts while seeking the Spirit of the Holy Ghost to help you catch a vision of these teachings in your life. With that vision, exercise your faith in acting upon their counsel.

Search and study the scriptures with a mind to receiving further light and knowledge of their message to you. Ponder them in your heart and allow them to inspire you. Then act on your inspiration.

As we learned as a family, we act when we fast and pray. Alma spoke of fasting and praying as a way of receiving a surety when he said, "I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself" (Alma 5:46). We too come to know how to handle the challenges of our lives through fasting and prayer.

We experience hard things in our lives that can sometimes diminish our vision and faith to do the things we should. We become so busy that we often feel overwhelmed and unable to do any more. While each of us is different, I humbly submit that we must focus our vision on the Savior and His teachings. What did He see in Peter, James, and John and the other Apostles that prompted Him to act to invite them to follow Him? Like His vision of them, the Savior has a great vision of who we can become. It will take the same faith and courage the first Apostles had in order for us to refocus on the things that matter most in bringing lasting happiness and great joy.

When we study the life of our Savior and His teachings, we see Him amongst the people teaching, praying, lifting, and healing. When we emulate Him and do the things we see Him do, we begin to see a vision of who we can become. You will be blessed with insight through the help of the Holy Ghost to do more good. Changes will begin to come, and you will bring a different order to your life that will bless you and your family. During His ministry among the Nephites, the Savior asked, “What manner of men ought ye to be?” He replied, “Even as I am” (3 Nephi 27:27). We need His help to become like Him, and He has shown us the way: “Therefore, ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for he that asketh, receiveth; and unto him that knocketh, it shall be opened” (3 Nephi 27:29).

I know that as we gain a vision of ourselves as the Savior sees us and as we act on that vision, our lives will be blessed in unexpected ways. Because of the vision of my parents, not only was my life blessed by educational experiences, but I was placed in circumstances where I found and embraced the gospel. More important, I learned the significance of good and faithful parents. Simply put, my life was changed forever.

Just as vision led my parents to fast and pray for their children’s welfare and as the early Apostles’ vision led them to follow the Savior, that same vision is available to inspire and help us to act. Brothers and sisters, we are a people with a history of vision and the faith and courage to do. Look at where we have come and the blessings we have received! Believe that He can bless you with vision in your life and the courage to act.

I bear you my witness of the Savior and His desire for us to return to Him. To do that, we must have the faith to do—to follow Him and become like Him. Throughout various times of our lives, He holds out His hand and invites us:

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:29–30).

Just as the Savior saw great potential in His early disciples, He also sees the same in us. Let us see ourselves as the Savior

sees us. I pray that we will have that vision with the faith and courage to do, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Only upon the Principles of Righteousness

By Elder Larry Y. Wilson

Of the Seventy

Wise parents prepare their children to get along without them. They provide opportunities for growth as children acquire the spiritual maturity to exercise their agency properly.

A month or so after we were married, my wife and I were taking a long road trip in the car. She was driving, and I was trying to relax. I say *trying* because the highway we were traveling had a reputation for speed traps, and my wife might have had a slight tendency toward a lead foot in those days. I said, “You’re going too fast. Slow down.”

My new bride thought to herself, “Well, I’ve been driving for nearly 10 years, and other than my driver’s education teacher, no one ever told me how to drive before.” So she replied, “What gives you the right to tell me how to drive?”

Frankly, her question caught me off guard. So, doing my best to step up to my new responsibilities as a married man, I said, “I don’t know—because I’m your husband and I hold the priesthood.”

Brethren, just a quick tip: if you are ever in a similar situation, that is *not* the right response. And I’m happy to report, it was the one and only time I ever made that mistake.

The Doctrine and Covenants explains that the right to use the priesthood in the home or elsewhere is directly connected with righteousness in our lives: “The powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness.”¹ It goes on to say that we lose that power when

we “exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of [others], in *any* degree of unrighteousness.”²

This scripture says we must lead by “principles of righteousness.” Such principles apply to all leaders in the Church as well as to all fathers and mothers in their homes.³ We lose our right to the Lord’s Spirit *and* to whatever authority we have from God when we exercise control over another person in an unrighteous manner.⁴ We may think such methods are for the good of the one being “controlled.” But anytime we try to compel someone to righteousness who *can* and *should* be exercising his or her own moral agency, we are acting unrighteously. When setting firm limits for another person *is* in order, those limits should always be administered with loving patience and in a way that teaches eternal principles.

We simply cannot force others to do the right thing. The scriptures make it clear that this is not God’s way. Compulsion builds resentment. It conveys mistrust, and it makes people feel incompetent. Learning opportunities are lost when controlling persons pridefully assume they have all the right answers for others. The scriptures say that “it is the nature and disposition of almost all men” to engage in this “unrighteous dominion,”⁵ so we should be aware that it’s an easy trap to fall into. Women too may exercise unrighteous dominion, though the scriptures identify the problem especially with men.

Unrighteous dominion is often accompanied by constant criticism and the withholding of approval or love. Those on the receiving end feel they can never please such leaders or parents and that they always fall short. Wise parents must weigh when children are ready to begin exercising their own agency in a particular area of their lives. But if parents hold on to *all* decision-making power and see it as their “right,” they severely limit the growth and development of their children.

Our children are in our homes for a limited time. If we wait until they walk out the door to turn over to them the reins of their moral agency, we have waited too long. They will not suddenly develop the ability to make wise decisions if they have never been free to make any important decisions while in our homes.

Such children often either rebel against this compulsion or are crippled by an inability to make any decisions on their own.

Wise parents prepare their children to get along without them. They provide opportunities for growth as children acquire the spiritual maturity to exercise their agency properly. And yes, this means children will sometimes make mistakes and learn from them.

Our family had an experience that taught us about helping children develop their ability to make choices. Our daughter Mary was a standout soccer player growing up. One year her team made it to the championships and, wouldn't you know it, that game was to be played on a Sunday. As a young teen, Mary had had years of teaching that the Sabbath was a day of rest and spiritual regeneration, not recreation. But she still felt pressure from her coaches and teammates to play, as well as a desire not to let her team down.

She asked us what she should do. My wife and I could easily have made this decision for her. However, we decided after prayerful consideration that in this case our daughter was ready to take spiritual responsibility for her own decision. We read some scriptures with her and encouraged Mary to pray and think about it.

After a few days she announced her decision. She would play the game on Sunday. Now what were we to do? After further discussion and receiving reassurance from the Spirit, we did as we had promised and permitted her to carry out her choice to play. After the game ended, Mary slowly walked over to her waiting mother. "Oh, Mom," she said, "that felt *awful*. I never want to feel like that again. I'm never playing another game on the Sabbath day." And she never did.

Mary had now internalized the principle of Sabbath keeping. If we had forced her not to play the game, we would have deprived her of a precious and powerful learning experience with the Spirit.

As you can see, helping children exercise their agency properly requires teaching them how to pray and receive answers to their prayers. There must also be teaching about the value and

purpose of obedience as well as about all other essential principles of the gospel.⁶

In raising our family, we decided that our most important goal would be to help our children establish their own connection to heaven. We knew that ultimately they would need to depend on the Lord, not on us. Brigham Young said, “Were I to draw a distinction in all the duties that are required of the children of men, . . . I would place first and foremost the duty of seeking unto the Lord our God until we open the path of communication from heaven to earth—from God to our own souls.”⁷

Mary had received answers to her prayers in other, earlier situations, and so we trusted that our daughter was developing this path of communication with heaven in her life. Thus she learned something positive from her experience and was equipped to make better choices in the future. Without a link to the Spirit, children and parents alike would be able to rationalize all sorts of poor decisions in the name of exercising their agency. The promise of scripture is that “they that are wise . . . and have taken the Holy Spirit for their guide [are not] deceived.”⁸

An additional and tragic side effect of unrighteous dominion can be a loss of trust in God’s love. I have known some people who were subject to demanding and controlling leaders or parents, and they have found it hard to feel the very love from their Heavenly Father that would sustain them and motivate them along the path of righteousness.

If we are going to help those in our stewardships make the all-important link with heaven, we must be the kind of parent and leader described in Doctrine and Covenants, section 121. We must act “only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned.”⁹ President Henry B. Eyring has said, “Of all the help we can give . . . young people, the greatest will be to let them feel our confidence that they are on the path home to God and that they can make it.”¹⁰

As we consider the principles that should guide us in the Church and at home, let me close with an illustration from the biography of President Thomas S. Monson. Ann Dibb, the Monsons’ daughter, says that to this day, when she walks in the front door of the house where she was raised, her father will say,

“Oh, look who’s here. And aren’t we glad, and isn’t she beautiful?” She goes on to say: “My parents always give me some compliment; it doesn’t matter what I look like or what I’ve been doing. . . . When I go and visit my parents, I know I am loved, I am complimented, I am made welcome, I am home.”¹¹

Brothers and sisters, this is the Lord’s way. Even if you’ve been mistreated in the past, I know the Lord wants you to come unto Him.¹² *All* are loved. *All* are welcomed. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1. Doctrine and Covenants 121:36.</p> <p>2. Doctrine and Covenants 121:37; emphasis added.</p> <p>3. See Neal A. Maxwell, “Put Off the Natural Man, and Come Off Conqueror,” <i>Tambuli</i>, Jan. 1991, 13–14; <i>Ensign</i>, Nov. 1990, 14–16.</p> <p>4. See Doctrine and Covenants 121:37.</p> <p>5. Doctrine and Covenants 121:39.</p> <p>6. See Doctrine and Covenants 68:25–29.</p> | <p>7. <i>Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young</i> (1997), 44.</p> <p>8. Doctrine and Covenants 45:57.</p> <p>9. Doctrine and Covenants 121:41.</p> <p>10. Henry B. Eyring, “Help Them on Their Way Home,” <i>Liahona</i> and <i>Ensign</i>, May 2010, 25.</p> <p>11. See Heidi S. Swinton, <i>To the Rescue: The Biography of Thomas S. Monson</i> (2010), 372.</p> <p>12. See Matthew 11:28.</p> |
|---|---|

Was It Worth It?

By Elder David F. Evans

Of the Seventy

The work of naturally and normally sharing the gospel with those we care about and love will be the work and joy of our lives.

During this conference and in other recent meetings,¹ many of us have wondered, what can I do to help build up the Lord's Church and see real growth where I live?

In this and every other important endeavor, our most important work is always within our own home and family.² It is within families that the Church is established and real growth occurs.³ We are to teach our children the principles and doctrines of the gospel. We need to help them have faith in Jesus Christ and prepare them for baptism when they are eight years old.⁴ We must be faithful ourselves so that they can see our example of love for the Lord and His Church. This helps our children feel joy in keeping the commandments, happiness in families, and gratitude in service to others. Within our homes we should follow the pattern given by Nephi when he said:

"We labor diligently . . . to persuade our children . . . to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God. . . .

". . . We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins."⁵

We labor diligently to bring these blessings to our children by attending church with them, holding family home evening, and reading the scriptures together. We pray daily with our family, accept callings, visit the sick and the lonely, and do other things

that let our children know that we love them and that we love our Heavenly Father, His Son, and Their Church.

We talk and prophesy of Christ as we give a family home evening lesson or sit with a child and tell of our love for him or her and of our testimony of the restored gospel.

We can write of Christ by writing letters to those who are away. Missionaries serving, sons or daughters in the military, and those we love are all blessed by letters we write. Letters from home are not just quick e-mails. Real letters provide something tangible that can be held, thought about, and cherished.

We help our children rely on the Savior's Atonement and know the forgiveness of a loving Heavenly Father by showing love and forgiveness in our own parenting. Our love and forgiveness not only draw our children closer to us but also build their faith in knowing that Heavenly Father loves them and that He will forgive them as they strive to repent and do better and be better. They trust this truth because they have experienced the same from their earthly parents.

In addition to the work we will do within our own family, Nephi taught that "we labor diligently to . . . persuade our . . . brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God."⁶ As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, every one of us has the blessing and responsibility of sharing the gospel. Some of those who need the gospel in their lives are not yet members of the Church. Some were once among us but need to feel again the joy they felt when they embraced the gospel at an earlier time in their lives. The Lord loves both the person who has never had the gospel and the person who is returning to Him.⁷ To Him and to us, it doesn't matter. It is all one work. It is the worth of souls, whatever their condition, that is great to our Heavenly Father, His Son, and to us.⁸ The work of our Heavenly Father and His Son is "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life"⁹ of all His children, regardless of their current circumstances. Our blessing is to help in this great work.

President Thomas S. Monson explained how we can help when he said: "Our missionary experiences have to be current. It is not enough to sit back and ponder former experiences. To be

fulfilled, you have to continue to naturally and normally share the gospel.”¹⁰

The work of naturally and normally sharing the gospel with those we care about and love will be the work and joy of our lives. Let me tell you about two such experiences.

Dave Orchard grew up in Salt Lake City, where most of his friends were members of the Church. They were a great influence on him. In addition, Church leaders in his neighborhood constantly invited him to activities. His friends did the same. Even though he didn’t join the Church at that time, his growing-up years were blessed by the influence of good LDS friends and Church-sponsored activities. After he entered college, he moved away from his home, and most of his friends left on missions. He missed their influence in his life.

One of Dave’s high school friends was still home. This friend was meeting every week with his bishop in an effort to put his life in order and be able to serve as a missionary. He and Dave became roommates, and as would be both natural and normal, they talked about why he wasn’t then serving as a missionary and why he was meeting frequently with the bishop. The friend expressed his gratitude and respect for his bishop and the opportunity to repent and serve. He then asked Dave whether he would like to come to the next interview. What an invitation! But in the context of their friendship and circumstances, it was both natural and normal.

Dave agreed and was soon meeting with the bishop himself. This led to Dave’s decision to meet with the missionaries. He received a testimony that the gospel is true, and a date for his baptism was set. Dave was baptized by his bishop, and a year later, Dave Orchard and Katherine Evans were married in the temple. They have five beautiful children. Katherine is my little sister. I will be forever grateful to this good friend who, together with a good bishop, brought Dave into the Church.

As Dave spoke of his conversion and bore his testimony regarding these events, he asked the question, “So, was it worth it? Was all the effort of friends and youth leaders and my bishop, over all the years, worth the effort to have just one boy be baptized?” Pointing to Katherine and his five children, he said,

“Well, at least for my wife and our five children, the answer is yes.”

Whenever the gospel is shared, it is never “just one boy.” Whenever conversion happens or someone returns to the Lord, it is a family that is saved. As Dave and Katherine’s children have grown, they have all embraced the gospel. One daughter and two sons have served as missionaries, and one just received his call to serve in the Alpine German-Speaking Mission. The two oldest have married in the temple, and the youngest is now in high school, faithful in every way. Was it worth it? Oh yes, it was worth it.

Sister Eileen Waite attended the same stake conference where Dave Orchard told of his conversion experience. Throughout the conference, all she could think of was her own family and particularly her sister, Michelle, who had long been away from the Church. Michelle was divorced and trying to raise four children. Eileen felt impressed to send her a copy of Elder M. Russell Ballard’s book *Our Search for Happiness*, together with her testimony, which she did. The very next week a friend told Eileen that she too had felt that she should contact Michelle. This friend also wrote Michelle a note, sharing her testimony and expressing her love. Isn’t it interesting how often the Spirit works on several people to help one in need?

Time passed. Michelle called Eileen and thanked her for the book. She said that she was beginning to recognize the spiritual void in her life. Eileen told her that she knew that the peace she was seeking could be found in the gospel. She told her that she loved her and wanted her to be happy. Michelle began to make changes in her life. Soon she met a wonderful man who was active in the Church. They married and a year later were sealed in the Ogden Utah Temple. Recently her 24-year-old son was baptized.

To the others in Michelle’s family and all others who do not yet know that this Church is true, I invite you to prayerfully consider whether the Church is true. Allow your family and friends and missionaries to help. When you know that it is true, and it is, come join with us by taking the same step in your life.

The end of this story has not yet been written, but blessings have been given to this wonderful woman and her family as those who love her acted on a prompting and in a natural and normal way shared their testimony and invited her to come back.

I have thought a lot about these two experiences. One young man who was working to put his own life in order helped another young man who was seeking the truth. One woman shared her testimony and her faith with her sister who had been away from the Church for 20 years. If we will pray and ask Heavenly Father who we can help and promise to act on the promptings He gives us letting us know how we can help, He will answer our prayers and we will become instruments in His hands to do His work. Acting in love upon the promptings given by the Spirit becomes the catalyst.¹¹

As you have listened to these experiences of naturally and normally sharing the gospel with those you care about, many of you have had the same experience that Eileen Waite had. You have thought of someone to whom you should reach out and either invite to come back or share with him or her your feelings about the gospel of Jesus Christ. My invitation is to act, without delay, on that prompting. Talk to your friend or family member. Do it in a natural and normal way. Let them know of your love for them and for the Lord. Missionaries can help. My counsel is the same that President Monson has given so many times from this very pulpit: "Never delay a prompting."¹² As you act on the prompting and do it with love, watch as our Heavenly Father uses your willingness to act to bring about a miracle in your life and in the life of the person you care about.¹³

My dear brothers and sisters, we can build up His Church and see real growth as we work to bring the blessings of the gospel to our family and to those we love. This is the work of our Heavenly Father and His Son. I know that They live and that They answer prayers. As we act on those promptings, having faith in Their ability to bring about a miracle, miracles will occur and lives will change. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, Feb. 11, 2012, LDS.org.
2. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee* (2000), 134.
3. See Boyd K. Packer, "Priesthood Power in the Home," Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, Feb. 11, 2012, LDS.org.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 68:25–28.
5. 2 Nephi 25:23, 26.
6. 2 Nephi 25:23.
7. See Luke 15:4–7.
8. See Doctrine and Covenants 18:10.
9. Moses 1:39.
10. "Status Report on Missionary Work: A Conversation with Elder Thomas S. Monson, Chairman of the Missionary Committee of the Council of the Twelve," *Ensign*, Oct. 1977, 14.
11. See Thomas S. Monson, "Anxiously Engaged," *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 56–59; "To the Rescue," *Liahona*, July 2001, 57–60; *Ensign*, May 2001, 48–50; "The Doorway of Love," *Liahona and Ensign*, Oct. 1996, 2–7.
12. See Ann M. Dibb, "My Father Is a Prophet" (Brigham Young University–Idaho devotional, Feb. 19, 2008), byui.edu/devotionalsandspeeches; Thomas S. Monson, "Stand in Your Appointed Place," *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2003, 54–57; "Peace, Be Still," *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 53–56; "Priesthood Power," *Liahona*, Jan. 2000, 58–61; *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 49–51; "The Spirit Giveth Life," *Ensign*, May 1985, 68–70.
13. In addition to President Thomas S. Monson, other prophets have taught this same principle. For example, President Spencer W. Kimball taught the importance of acting on the impressions given through the Spirit when he said: "God does notice us, and he watches over us. But it is usually through another person that he meets our needs. Therefore, it is vital that we serve each other in the kingdom" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* [2006], 82).

To Hold Sacred

By Elder Paul B. Pieper

Of the Seventy

Sacred things are to be treated with more care, given greater deference, and regarded with deeper reverence.

Some 1,500 years before Christ, a shepherd was drawn to a burning bush on the slopes of Mount Horeb. That divine encounter began the transformation of Moses from a shepherd to a prophet and his work from herding sheep to gathering Israel. Thirteen hundred years later, a privileged young priest in a king's court was captivated by the witness of a condemned prophet. That encounter began Alma's evolution from a civil servant to a servant of God. Nearly 2,000 years later, a 14-year-old boy entered the woods seeking an answer to a sincere question. Joseph Smith's encounter in the grove placed him on the path to prophethood and a restoration.

Moses's, Alma's, and Joseph Smith's lives were all changed by encounters with the divine. These experiences strengthened them to remain faithful to the Lord and His work throughout their lives despite overwhelming opposition and subsequent difficult trials.

Our experiences with the divine may not be as direct or dramatic nor our challenges as daunting. However, as with the prophets, our strength to endure faithfully depends upon recognizing, remembering, and holding sacred that which we receive from above.

Today authority, keys, and ordinances have been restored to the earth. There are also scriptures and special witnesses. Those who seek God may receive baptism for the remission of sins and confirmation "by the laying on of hands for the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost" (D&C 20:41). With these precious restored

gifts, our divine encounters will mostly involve the third member of the Godhead, the Holy Ghost.

*Through a still small voice, the Spirit speaks to me
To guide me, to save me.*

("The Still Small Voice," *Children's Songbook*, 106)

*Let the Holy Spirit guide;
Let him teach us what is true.
He will testify of Christ,
Light our minds with heaven's view.*

("Let the Holy Spirit Guide," *Hymns*, no. 143)

As we seek answers from God, we feel the still, small voice whisper to our spirits. These feelings—these impressions—are so natural and so subtle that we may overlook them or attribute them to reason or intuition. These individualized messages testify of God's personal love and concern for each of His children and their personal mortal missions. Daily reflecting upon and recording the impressions that come from the Spirit serve the dual purposes of helping us (1) to recognize our personal encounters with the divine and (2) to preserve them for ourselves and our posterity. Recording them is also a formal recognition and acknowledgment of our gratitude to God, for "in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things" (D&C 59:21).

With respect to that which we receive by the Spirit, the Lord said, "Remember that that which cometh from above is sacred" (D&C 63:64). His statement is more than a reminder; it is also a definition and an explanation. Light and knowledge from heaven is sacred. It is sacred because heaven is its source.

Sacred means worthy of veneration and respect. By designating something as sacred, the Lord signals that it is of higher value and priority than other things. Sacred things are to be treated with more care, given greater deference, and regarded with deeper reverence. Sacred ranks high in the hierarchy of heavenly values.

That which is sacred to God becomes sacred to us only through the exercise of agency; each must choose to accept and hold sacred that which God has defined as sacred. He sends light and knowledge from heaven. He invites us to receive and treat it as sacred.

But “there is an opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11). The opposite of sacred is profane or secular—that which is temporal or worldly. The worldly constantly competes with the sacred for our attention and priorities. Knowledge of the secular is essential for our daily temporal living. The Lord instructs us to seek learning and wisdom, to study and learn out of the best books, and to become acquainted with languages, tongues, and people (see D&C 88:118; 90:15). Therefore, the choice to place the sacred above the secular is one of relative priority, not exclusivity; “to be learned is good *if* [we] hearken unto the counsels of God” (2 Nephi 9:29; emphasis added).

The battle for priority between the sacred and the secular in each human heart can be illustrated by Moses’s experience at the burning bush. There Moses received his sacred calling from Jehovah to deliver the children of Israel from bondage. However, initially his worldly knowledge of the power of Egypt and the pharaoh caused him to doubt. Ultimately, Moses exercised faith in the Lord’s word, subjugating his secular knowledge and trusting in the sacred. That trust provided him power to overcome temporal trials and lead Israel out of Egypt.

After escaping from the armies of Noah only to fall into slavery at the hands of Amulon, Alma could have doubted the spiritual witness he had received while listening to Abinadi. However, he trusted the sacred and was given strength to endure and escape his temporary trials.

Joseph Smith faced a similar dilemma in the early days of translating the Book of Mormon. He knew the sacred nature of the plates and the work of translation. Yet he was persuaded by Martin Harris to give priority to the worldly concerns of friendship and finances, contrary to sacred instructions. As a result, the manuscript of the translation was lost. The Lord upbraided Joseph for delivering “that which [is] sacred, unto wickedness” (D&C 10:9) and deprived him for a time of the

plates and the gift to translate. When Joseph's priorities were properly reestablished, the sacred things were returned and the work continued.

The Book of Mormon provides other examples of the struggle to give priority to the sacred. It speaks of believers whose faith led them to the tree of life to partake of its sacred fruit, the love of God. Then the mocking of those in the great and spacious building caused the believers to shift their focus from the sacred to the secular. (See 1 Nephi 8:11, 24–28.) Later the Nephites chose pride and denied the spirit of prophecy and revelation, “making a mock of that which was sacred” (Helaman 4:12). Even some eyewitnesses of the signs and miracles associated with the Lord's birth chose to reject sacred manifestations from heaven in favor of secular explanations (see 3 Nephi 2:1–3).

Today the struggle continues. Secular voices are growing in volume and intensity. They increasingly urge believers to abandon beliefs the world considers irrational and unreasonable. Because “we see through a glass, darkly” (1 Corinthians 13:12) and “do not know the meaning of all things” (1 Nephi 11:17), at times we may feel vulnerable and in need of greater spiritual assurances. The Lord told Oliver Cowdery:

“If you desire a further witness, cast your mind upon the night that you cried unto me in your heart, that you might know concerning the truth of these things.

“Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have than from God?” (D&C 6:22–23).

The Lord reminded Oliver and us to rely on sacred personal witnesses already received when our faith is challenged. Like Moses's, Alma's and Joseph's before, these divine encounters serve as spiritual anchors to keep us safe and on course in times of trial.

The sacred cannot be selectively surrendered. Those who choose to abandon even one sacred thing will have their minds darkened (see D&C 84:54), and unless they repent, the light they have shall be taken from them (see D&C 1:33). Unanchored by the sacred, they will find themselves morally adrift on a secular sea. In contrast, those who hold sacred things sacred receive

promises: "That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day" (D&C 50:24).

May the Lord bless us to ever and always recognize, remember, and hold sacred that which we have received from above. I testify that as we do, we will have power to endure the trials and overcome the challenges of our day. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

What Thinks Christ of Me?

By Elder Neil L. Andersen

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

As you love Him, trust Him, believe Him, and follow Him, you will feel His love and approval.

A reporter from a leading Brazilian magazine studied the Church in preparation for a major news article.¹ He examined our doctrine and visited the missionary training and humanitarian centers. He spoke with friends of the Church and with others who were not so friendly. In the interview with me, the reporter seemed honestly puzzled as he asked, “How could someone not consider you Christian?” I knew he was referring to the Church, but my mind somehow framed the question personally, and I found myself silently asking, “Does my life reflect the love and devotion I feel for the Savior?”

Jesus asked the Pharisees, “What think ye of Christ?”² In the final assessment, our personal discipleship will not be judged by friends or foes. Rather, as Paul said, “We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”³ At that day the important question for each of us will be, “What thinks Christ of me?”

Even with His love for all mankind, Jesus reprovably referred to some around Him as hypocrites,⁴ fools,⁵ and workers of iniquity.⁶ He approvingly called others children of the kingdom⁷ and the light of the world.⁸ He disapprovingly referred to some as blinded⁹ and unfruitful.¹⁰ He commended others as pure in heart¹¹ and hungering after righteousness.¹² He lamented that some were faithless¹³ and of the world,¹⁴ but others He esteemed as chosen,¹⁵ disciples,¹⁶ friends.¹⁷ And so we each ask, “What thinks Christ of me?”

President Thomas S. Monson has described our day as moving away “from that which is spiritual . . . [with] the winds of

change [swirling] around us and the moral fiber of society [continuing] to disintegrate before our very eyes."¹⁸ It is a time of growing disbelief in and disregard for Christ and His teachings.

In this turbulent environment, we rejoice in being disciples of Jesus Christ. We see the Lord's hand all around us. Our destination is beautifully set before us. "This is life eternal," Jesus prayed, "that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."¹⁹ Being a disciple in these days of destiny will be a badge of honor throughout the eternities.

The messages we have heard during this conference are guideposts from the Lord on our journey of discipleship. As we have listened during the past two days, praying for spiritual guidance, and as we study and pray about these messages in the days ahead, the Lord blesses us with customized direction through the gift of the Holy Ghost. These feelings turn us even more toward God, repenting, obeying, believing, and trusting. The Savior responds to our acts of faith. "If a man [or woman] love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."²⁰

Jesus's call "Come, follow me"²¹ is not only for those prepared to compete in a spiritual Olympics. In fact, discipleship is not a competition at all but an invitation to all. Our journey of discipleship is not a dash around the track, nor is it fully comparable to a lengthy marathon. In truth, it is a lifelong migration toward a more celestial world.

His invitation is a call to daily duty. Jesus said: "If ye love me, keep my commandments."²² "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."²³ We may not be at our very best every day, but if we are trying, Jesus's bidding is full of encouragement and hope: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."²⁴

Wherever you now find yourself on the road of discipleship, you are on the right road, the road toward eternal life. Together we can lift and strengthen one another in the great and important days ahead. Whatever the difficulties confronting us, the weaknesses confining us, or the impossibilities surrounding us,

let us have faith in the Son of God, who declared, “All things are possible to him that believeth.”²⁵

Let me share two examples of discipleship in action. The first is from the life of President Thomas S. Monson, demonstrating the power of simple kindness and Jesus’s teaching, “He that is greatest among you shall be your servant.”²⁶

Nearly 20 years ago, President Monson spoke in general conference about a 12-year-old young woman suffering from cancer. He told of her courage and the kindness of her friends to carry her up Mount Timpanogos in central Utah.

A few years ago I met Jami Palmer Brinton and heard the story from a different perspective—the perspective of what President Monson had done for her.

Jami met President Monson in March 1993, a day after being told that a mass above her right knee was a fast-growing bone cancer. With her father assisting, President Monson administered a priesthood blessing, promising, “Jesus will be on your right side and on your left side to buoy you up.”

“Upon leaving his office that day,” Jami said, “I unfastened a balloon tied to my wheelchair and gave it to him. ‘You’re the Best!’ it announced in bright letters.”

Through her chemotherapy treatments and limb-saving surgery, President Monson did not forget her. Jami said, “President Monson exemplified what it means to be a true disciple of Christ. [He] lifted me from sorrow to great and abiding hope.” Three years after their first meeting, Jami again sat in President Monson’s office. At the end of the meeting, he did something that Jami will never forget. So typical of President Monson’s thoughtfulness, he surprised her with the very same balloon that she had given to him three years before. “You’re the Best!” the balloon proclaimed. He had saved it, knowing she would return to his office when she was cured of cancer. Fourteen years after first meeting Jami, President Monson performed her marriage to Jason Brinton in the Salt Lake Temple.²⁷

We can learn so much from the discipleship of President Monson. He often reminds the General Authorities to remember this simple question: “What would Jesus do?”

Jesus told the leader of the synagogue, “Be not afraid, only believe.”²⁸ Discipleship is believing Him in seasons of peace and believing Him in seasons of difficulty, when our pain and fear are calmed only by the conviction that He loves us and keeps His promises.

I recently met a family who is a beautiful example of how we believe Him. Olgan and Soline Saintelus, from Port-au-Prince, Haiti, told me their story.

On January 12, 2010, Olgan was at work and Soline was at the church when a devastating earthquake struck Haiti. Their three children—Gancci, age five, Angie, age three, and Gansly, age one—were at home in their apartment with a friend.

Massive devastation was everywhere. As you will remember, tens of thousands lost their lives that January in Haiti. Olgan and Soline ran as fast as they could to their apartment to find the children. The three-story apartment building where the Saintelus family lived had collapsed.

The children had not escaped. No rescue efforts would be devoted to a building that was so completely destroyed.

Olgan and Soline Saintelus had both served full-time missions and had been married in the temple. They believed in the Savior and in His promises to them. Yet their hearts were broken. They wept uncontrollably.

Olgan told me that in his darkest hour he began to pray. “Heavenly Father, if it be thy will, if there could be just one of my children alive, please, please help us.” Over and over he walked around the building, praying for inspiration. The neighbors tried to comfort him and help him accept the loss of his children. Olgan continued to walk around the rubble of the collapsed building, hoping, praying. Then something quite miraculous happened. Olgan heard the almost inaudible cry of a baby. It was the cry of his baby.

For hours the neighbors frantically dug into the rubble, risking their own lives. In the dark of the night, through the piercing sounds of hammers and chisels, the rescue workers heard another sound. They stopped their pounding and listened. They couldn’t believe what they were hearing. It was the sound of a little child—and he was singing. Five-year-old Gancci later

said that he knew his father would hear him if he sang. Under the weight of crushing concrete that would later result in the amputation of his arm, Gancci was singing his favorite song, "I Am a Child of God."²⁹

As the hours passed amid the darkness, death, and despair of so many other precious sons and daughters of God in Haiti, the Saintelus family had a miracle. Gancci, Angie, and Gansly were discovered alive under the flattened building.³⁰

Miracles are not always so immediate. At times we thoughtfully wonder why the miracle we have so earnestly prayed for does not happen here and now. But as we trust in the Savior, promised miracles will occur. Whether in this life or the next, all will be made right. The Savior declares: "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."³¹ "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."³²

I testify that as you love Him, trust Him, believe Him, and follow Him, you will feel His love and approval. As you ask, "What thinks Christ of me?" you will know that you are His disciple; you are His friend. By His grace He will do for you what you cannot do for yourself.

We eagerly await the concluding remarks of our beloved prophet. President Thomas S. Monson was ordained an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ when I was 12 years old. For more than 48 years we have been blessed to hear him bear witness of Jesus Christ. I testify that he now stands as the Savior's senior Apostle upon the earth.

With great love and admiration for the many disciples of Jesus Christ who are not members of this Church, we humbly declare that angels have returned to the earth in our day. The Church of Jesus Christ as He established it anciently has been restored, with the power, ordinances, and blessings of heaven. The Book of Mormon is another testament of Jesus Christ.

I witness that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. He suffered and died for our sins and rose the third day. He is resurrected. In a future day, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is the Christ.³³ On that day, our concern will not be, "Do others consider me Christian?" At that time, our

eyes will be fixed on Him, and our souls will be riveted on the question, “What thinks Christ of me?” He lives. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See André Petry, “Entre a Fé e a Urna,” *Veja*, Nov. 2, 2011, 96.
2. Matthew 22:42.
3. Romans 14:10.
4. See Matthew 6:2.
5. See Matthew 23:17.
6. See Matthew 7:23.
7. See Matthew 13:38.
8. See Matthew 5:14.
9. See Matthew 15:14.
10. See Matthew 13:22.
11. See Matthew 5:8.
12. See Matthew 5:6.
13. See Matthew 17:17.
14. See John 8:23.
15. See John 6:70.
16. See John 13:35.
17. See John 15:13.
18. Thomas S. Monson, “Stand in Holy Places,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 83, 86.
19. John 17:3.
20. John 14:23.
21. Luke 18:22.
22. John 14:15.
23. Luke 9:23.
24. Matthew 11:28.
25. Mark 9:23.
26. Matthew 23:11.
27. Jami Brinton, letter to author, Jan. 27, 2012.
28. Mark 5:36.
29. “I Am a Child of God,” *Children’s Songbook*, 2–3.
30. From a discussion with Olgan and Soline Saintelus on Feb. 10, 2012; see also Jennifer Samuels, “Family Reunited in Miami after Trauma in Haiti,” *Church News*, Jan. 30, 2010, 6.
31. John 14:27.
32. John 16:33.
33. See Romans 14:11.

As We Close This Conference

By President Thomas S. Monson

May you ponder the truths you have heard, and may they help you to become even better than you were when conference began.

My heart is full as we come to the close of this glorious conference. We have been so richly blessed as we have listened to the counsel and testimonies of those who have spoken to us. I think you will agree with me that we have felt the Spirit of the Lord as our hearts have been touched and our testimonies strengthened.

Once again we have enjoyed beautiful music, which has enhanced and enriched each session of conference. I express my gratitude to all who have shared with us their talents in this regard.

My heartfelt thanks go to each who has spoken to us as well as to those who have offered prayers at each of the sessions.

There are countless individuals who work either behind the scenes or in less visible positions each conference. It would not be possible for us to hold these sessions without their assistance. My thanks go to all of them as well.

I know you join with me in expressing profound gratitude to those brethren and sisters who have been released during this conference. We will miss them. Their contributions to the work of the Lord have been enormous and will be felt throughout generations to come.

We have also sustained, through uplifted hands, brethren and sisters who have been called to new positions during this conference. We welcome them and want them to know that we look forward to serving with them in the cause of the Master. They have been called by inspiration from on high.

We have had unprecedented coverage of this conference, reaching across the continents and oceans to people everywhere. Though we are far removed from many of you, we feel of your spirit and your dedication, and we send our love and appreciation to you wherever you are.

How blessed we are, my brothers and sisters, to have the restored gospel of Jesus Christ in our lives and in our hearts. It provides answers to life's greatest questions. It provides meaning and purpose and hope to our lives.

We live in troubled times. I assure you that our Heavenly Father is mindful of the challenges we face. He loves each of us and desires to bless us and to help us. May we call upon Him in prayer, as He admonished when He said, "Pray always, and I will pour out my Spirit upon you, and great shall be your blessing—yea, even more than if you should obtain treasures of earth."¹

My dear brothers and sisters, may your homes be filled with love and courtesy and with the Spirit of the Lord. Love your families. If there are disagreements or contentions among you, I urge you to settle them now. Said the Savior:

"There shall be no disputations among you. . . .

"For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another.

"[But] behold, this is not my doctrine . . . ; but *this* is my doctrine, that such things should be done away."²

As your humble servant, I echo the words of King Benjamin in his address to his people when he said:

"I have not commanded you to . . . think that I of myself am more than a mortal man.

"But I am like as yourselves, subject to all manner of infirmities in body and mind; yet I have been chosen . . . by the

hand of the Lord . . . and have been kept and preserved by his matchless power, to serve you with all the might, mind and strength which the Lord hath granted unto me.”³

My beloved brothers and sisters, I desire with all my heart to do God’s will and to serve Him and to serve you.

Now as we leave this conference, I invoke the blessings of heaven upon each of you. May you who are away from your homes return to them safely. May you ponder the truths you have heard, and may they help you to become even better than you were when conference began two days ago.

Until we meet again in six months’ time, I ask the Lord’s blessings to be upon you and, indeed, upon all of us, and I do so in His holy name—even Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior—amen.

Notes

1. Doctrine and Covenants 19:38.
2. 3 Nephi 11:28–30; emphasis added.
3. Mosiah 2:10–11.

Arise and Shine Forth

By Ann M. Dibb

Second Counselor in the Young Women General Presidency

One of the greatest ways we can arise and shine forth is to confidently obey the commandments of God.

It is a privilege for me to share this evening with you. Every January, I anxiously look forward to the announcement of the new Mutual theme. However, I always take a moment to evaluate whether I've mastered the lessons of the *past year's* theme.

For a moment, let's review recent themes: "Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly,"¹ "Be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works,"² "Be thou an example of the believers,"³ "Be strong and of a good courage,"⁴ and the thirteenth article of faith: "We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men."⁵

Studying and focusing on these scriptures for a full year has allowed them to become a part of our hearts, our souls, and our testimonies. We hope you will continue to follow their guidance as we turn our focus to the 2012 Mutual theme, found in the Doctrine and Covenants.

The heading for section 115 explains the year was 1838 and the setting was Far West, Missouri. Joseph Smith was "making known the will of God concerning the building up of that place and of the Lord's House." The Prophet was optimistic and encouraged. In verse 5, where we find this year's theme, the Lord tells him, "Verily I say unto you all: Arise and shine forth, that thy light may be a standard for the nations."

What do you think of when you hear the word *arise*? Personally, I think of you—the noble youth of the Church. I picture you diligently arising from your beds each morning for

early-morning seminary. I see you faithfully arising from your knees after finishing your daily prayers. I think of you courageously arising to share your testimony and defend your standards. I am inspired by your commitment to the gospel and your good examples. Many of you have already accepted this invitation to arise and shine forth, and your light encourages others to do the same.

One of the greatest ways we can arise and shine forth is to confidently obey the commandments of God. We learn of these commandments in the scriptures, from modern-day prophets, and within the pages of the booklet *For the Strength of Youth*. Each of you should have your own copy. On my personal copy, I have circled the words *for* and *you*, as taught to me by a respected friend. This simple act reminds me that these standards are not just general guidelines—they are specifically *for me*. I hope you will take the time to circle those words on your own booklet, read it cover to cover, and feel the Spirit testify that the standards are *for you* as well.

There may be those of you who are tempted to disregard or dismiss the standards in *For the Strength of Youth*. They may look at the booklet and say, “See, Mother, the book doesn’t talk about [fill in the current issue].” Or they may justify to themselves, “What I’m doing isn’t that bad. I’m certainly not as bad as [insert the name of a friend or an acquaintance].”

President Harold B. Lee taught, “The most important of all the commandments of God is that one that you are having the most difficulty keeping today.”⁶ King Benjamin explained, “I cannot tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them.”⁷ If you are struggling with keeping these standards and commandments, I encourage you to look for support within the gospel. Read your scriptures. Spend time on the Church’s official website, LDS.org, to find answers to your questions. Talk to your parents, your Church leaders, and those who shine brightly as they live the gospel. Pray. Pour out your heart to your Heavenly Father, who loves you. Use the gift of repentance daily. Serve others. And most important, listen to and obey the promptings of the Holy Ghost.

President Thomas S. Monson encourages us all with these words: “My young friends, be strong. . . . You know what is right and what is wrong, and no disguise, however appealing, can change that. . . . If your so-called friends urge you to do anything you know to be wrong, *you* be the one to make a stand for right, even if you stand alone.”⁸

Heavenly Father does not want us to look to the world and *follow* its ever-changing trends. He wants us to look to Him and follow His unchanging guidance. He wants us to live the gospel and *lead* others to it by setting the standard high.

The scriptures provide many great examples to illustrate this idea. In the book of Judges in the Old Testament, we learn about Samson. Samson was born with great potential. His mother was promised, “He shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.”⁹ But as Samson grew, he looked more to the world’s temptations than to God’s direction. He made choices because they “pleaseth [him] well”¹⁰ rather than because those choices were right. Repeatedly, the scriptures use the phrase “and he went down”¹¹ as they tell of Samson’s journeys, actions, and choices. Instead of arising and shining forth to fulfill his great potential, Samson was overcome by the world, lost his God-given power, and died a tragic, early death.

On the other hand, the scriptures provide the example of Daniel. Daniel was also born with great potential. In the book of Daniel, chapter 6, we read, “Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him.”¹² When worldly challenges came to Daniel, he didn’t look down at the world—he arose and looked to heaven. Instead of following the king’s worldly decree that no one should pray to anyone but the king for 30 days, Daniel “went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.”¹³

Daniel was not afraid to arise and shine forth in following God’s commandments. Although he spent an uncomfortable night in the lions’ den for standing for what was right, he was protected and blessed for his obedience. When King Darius removed Daniel from the lions’ den the next morning, he made a

decree that everyone should fear Daniel's God and follow Daniel's example of faithfulness. Truly, Daniel shows us what it means to be a standard for the nations and never lower our standards in the face of worldly temptations.

I have been blessed to hear many modern-day examples of youth, just like you, who are not afraid to arise and shine forth and allow their light to be a standard among their peers. Joanna was one of only three members of the Church in her high school and the only young woman in her ward. She committed to herself and the Lord that she would never use bad language. When she was paired with a young man for a school project who had not made the same commitment, she did not lower her standards. She asked him to respect and honor her values. Over time, with many gentle and some not-so-gentle reminders, her friend formed new habits and used cleaner language. Many people noticed the difference, including his father, who thanked Joanna for being a good influence in his son's life.¹⁴

On a recent assignment in the Philippines, I met Karen, who shared an experience she had as a Laurel while studying for a bachelor's degree in hotel and restaurant management. A teacher required that every student learn to make and taste the variety of drinks that would be served in their restaurants. Some of the drinks contained alcohol, and Karen knew it was against the Lord's commandments for her to taste them. In the face of serious consequences, Karen found courage to arise and shine forth, and she did not partake of the drinks.

Karen explained: "My teacher approached me and asked me why I was not drinking. He said, 'Miss Karen, how will you know the flavor and pass this important subject if you do not at least taste the drinks?' I told him that I am a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and as members, we do not drink things that are harmful to us. Whatever he expected of me, even if it meant receiving a failing grade, I would understand, but I would not fail to live my personal standards."

Weeks passed, and nothing more was said about that day. At the end of the semester, Karen knew her final grade would reflect her refusal to taste the drinks. She hesitated to look at her grade,

but when she did, she discovered that she had received the highest grade in the class.

She said: "I learned through this experience that God . . . will surely bless us when we follow Him. I also know that even if I had received a failing grade, I would not regret what I had done. I know that I will never fail in the Lord's sight when I choose to do what I know to be the right thing."¹⁵

Dear young women, each of you has been born with great potential. You are beloved daughters of Heavenly Father. He knows you and He loves you. He invites you to "arise and shine forth," and He promises that as you do, He will sustain and bless you. I pray that each of you will find the courage to accept His invitation and receive His promises, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Doctrine and Covenants 121:45.
2. Mosiah 5:15.
3. 1 Timothy 4:12.
4. Joshua 1:9.
5. Articles of Faith 1:13.
6. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee* (2000), 30.
7. Mosiah 4:29.
8. Thomas S. Monson, "Examples of Righteousness," *Liahona* and *Ensign*, May 2008, 65.
9. Judges 13:5.
10. Judges 14:3.
11. Judges 14:7.
12. Daniel 6:3.
13. Daniel 6:10.
14. For a portion of this story, see Joanna Ehrisman, "The Thing about Being Mormon," in Katilin Medlin and others, eds., *Going on 15: Memoirs of Freshmen* (2010), 93–96.
15. Personal correspondence to author, 2012.

Seek Learning: You Have a Work to Do

By **Mary N. Cook**

First Counselor in the Young Women General Presidency

Bless your children and your future home by learning as much as you can now.

My dear young women, how we love each one of you. We see you courageously arising and shining forth with light in a world where great challenges accompany great opportunities. This may cause you to wonder, what does the future hold for me? I assure you that as you are a virtuous daughter of God, your future is bright! You live at a time when the truths of the gospel have been restored, and these truths can be found in your scriptures. You received the gift of the Holy Ghost at the time of your baptism, and the Holy Ghost will teach you truth and prepare you for life's challenges.

God gave you moral agency and the opportunity to learn while on earth, and He has a work for you to do. To accomplish this work, you have an individual responsibility to seek learning. The key to your future, your "bright ray of hope,"¹ can be found in the new *For the Strength of Youth* booklet under the standard of education and in the Young Women value of knowledge.

"Education . . . will open the doors of opportunity."² As you follow the Lord's admonition to "seek learning, even by study and also by faith,"³ you gain not only knowledge from your study but added light as you learn by faith.

Seek learning by studying diligently. Rarely will you be able to spend as much time dedicated to learning as you can now. President Gordon B. Hinckley wisely counseled the youth of the Church: "The pattern of study you establish during your formal

schooling will in large measure affect your lifelong thirst for knowledge.”⁴ “You must get all of the education that you possibly can. . . . Sacrifice anything that is needed to be sacrificed to qualify yourselves to do the work of [this] world. . . . Train your minds and hands to become an influence for good as you go forward with your lives.”⁵

In speaking specifically to women, President Thomas S. Monson said: “Often the future is unknown; therefore, it behooves us to prepare for uncertainties. . . . I urge you to pursue your education and learn marketable skills so that, should such a situation arise, you are prepared to provide.”⁶

Young women, follow the advice of these wise and inspired prophets. Be a good student. Arise and shine forth in your schools with hard work, honesty, and integrity. If you are struggling or discouraged with your performance in school, seek help from your parents, teachers, and helpful Church members. Never give up!

Make a list of the things you want to learn; then “share your educational goals with your family, friends, and leaders so they can support and encourage you.”⁷ This is the pattern of Personal Progress.

With technology you are witnessing an explosion of knowledge. You are constantly bombarded by sound, video, and networking. Be selective and don’t allow this surge of information to distract you or slow your progress. Arise, young women! *You* determine your goals. *You* decide what enters your mind and heart.

Some of your most important learning will be outside of the classroom. Surround yourself with exemplary women who can teach you skills in homemaking, art, music, family history, sports, writing, or speaking. Get to know them and ask them to mentor you. When you have learned something new, teach it at Mutual or become a mentor to other young women as part of the requirements for your Honor Bee.

In addition to my wonderful mother, I’ve had many mentors in my life. I first became acquainted with the process of mentoring when I was just nine years old. My Primary teacher taught me to cross-stitch “I Will Bring the Light of the Gospel into

My Home," a picture that hung in my room during my teenage years. My teacher guided me, corrected me, and always encouraged me along the way. Other mentors followed. Two excellent seamstresses in my ward taught me sewing. With their guidance, patience, and encouragement, I entered a dress in a sewing contest when I was 14, and I actually won a prize! The process increased my thirst for knowledge and excellence in other areas as well.

Gaining knowledge now will pay huge dividends when you become a mother. "A mother's education level has a profound influence on the educational choices of her [children]." ⁸ A mother's education can hold the "key to halt [the] poverty cycle." ⁹ Educated women "tend to: Give birth to healthier babies, have children who are healthier, be more confident, resilient and have improved reasoning and judgment." ¹⁰

We learn in "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" that "mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children." ¹¹ Providing an education for your children is part of that nurturing and is your sacred responsibility. Like the stripling warriors, who "had been taught by their mothers," ¹² you will be the most important teacher your children will ever have, so choose your learning carefully. Bless your children and your future home by learning as much as you can now.

Seek learning by faith. We learn by faith as we diligently gain spiritual knowledge through prayer, scripture study, and obedience and as we seek the guidance of the Holy Ghost, who testifies of all truth. If you do your part to gain knowledge, the Holy Ghost can enlighten your mind. As you strive to keep yourself worthy, the Holy Ghost will give direction and added light to your learning.

When I was a young woman, I borrowed skis that were way too long and boots that were way too big, and a friend taught me to ski! We went on a beautiful spring day filled with bright sun, perfect snow, and cloudless, blue skies. Anxiety about the steep slopes gave way to delight as I learned. And though I tumbled quite a few times on those long skis, I got up and I kept trying. I came to love the sport!

I soon found out, however, that not all ski days and weather conditions were that ideal. On days with overcast skies, we skied in a condition called “flat light.” Flat light occurs when the light from the sun is diffused by the clouds. Looking ahead at the white snow, you find that your depth perception vanishes, and it is difficult to judge the steepness of the slope or see the moguls and bumps on the hill.

Young women, you may be looking forward to your future as I looked at that steep ski slope. You may feel at times that you are living in flat light, unable to see what lies ahead of you. Learning by faith will give you confidence and will help you navigate your way through times of uncertainty.

In the 25th chapter of Matthew, the parable of the ten virgins teaches us that spiritual preparation is vital and must be achieved individually. You will recall that all ten virgins were invited to escort the bridegroom into the wedding feast, but only the five wise virgins were prepared with oil in their lamps.

“And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.

“But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

“And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.”¹³

You may think it selfish that the five wise virgins did not share their oil, but it was impossible. Spiritual preparation must be acquired individually, drop by drop, and cannot be shared.

The time is now for you to diligently apply yourselves to increasing your spiritual knowledge—drop by drop—through prayer, scripture study, and obedience. The time is now to pursue your education—drop by drop. Each virtuous thought and action also adds oil to your lamps, qualifying you for the guidance of the Holy Ghost, our divine teacher.

The Holy Ghost will guide you on your journey here in mortality, even when you feel you are in flat light, uncertain of what lies ahead. You need not fear. As you stay on the path that

leads to eternal life, the Holy Ghost will guide you in your decisions and in your learning.

I testify from personal experience that if you will seek learning not only by study but also by faith, you *will* be guided in what “the Lord . . . will need you to do and what you will need to know.”¹⁴

I received my patriarchal blessing as a young woman and was counseled to prepare myself with a good education and to learn early in life those virtues that go into homemaking and rearing a family. I so wanted the blessing of a family; however, that blessing wasn’t fulfilled until I was 37, when I eventually married. My husband had been widowed, so the day we were sealed in the temple, I was suddenly blessed with not only a husband but a family of four children.

Long before that, there were many days when I felt like I was skiing in flat light, asking the question, “What does the future hold for me?” I tried to follow the admonitions in my patriarchal blessing. I studied diligently to become a schoolteacher and continued my education to become an elementary school principal. I prayed to my Heavenly Father and sought the guidance of the Holy Ghost. I held fervently to the promise of prophets who assured me that if I “remain true and faithful, keep [my] covenants, serve God, and love [my] Father in Heaven and the Lord Jesus Christ, [I] will not be denied any of the eternal blessings our Heavenly Father has for His faithful children.”¹⁵

I know that my education prepared me for a life that has been nothing like I had envisioned as a young woman. I thought I was studying education to teach school and my future children, but I did not know the Lord was also preparing me to teach English in Mongolia on a mission with my husband and to teach the young women of the Church throughout the world and to teach my grandchildren the value of knowledge—all wonderful blessings I could never have imagined.

I testify that our Father in Heaven does know and love you. He has placed great trust in you and has work that only *you* can do. I want to assure you that you *will* be prepared for that great work if you seek learning by study and also by faith. Of this I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Reaching Down to Lift Another," *Liahona*, Jan. 2002, 67; *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 54.
2. *For the Strength of Youth* (booklet, 2011), 9.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 88:118.
4. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Way to Be! Nine Ways to Be Happy and Make Something of Your Life* (2002), 28.
5. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Seek Learning," *New Era*, Sept. 2007, 2, 4.
6. Thomas S. Monson, "If Ye Are Prepared Ye Shall Not Fear," *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 116.
7. *For the Strength of Youth*, 9.
8. Cheryl Hanewicz and Susan R. Madsen, "The Influence of a Mother on a Daughter's College Decision," *Utah Women and Education Project Research Snapshots*, no. 3 (Jan. 2011): 1.
9. Marjorie Cortez, "Mom's Education Key to Halt Poverty Cycle," *Deseret News*, Sept. 23, 2011, A1.
10. Olene Walker, "More Utah Women Need to Finish College," *Salt Lake Tribune*, Oct. 30, 2011, O4.
11. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.
12. Alma 56:47.
13. Matthew 25:8-10.
14. Henry B. Eyring, "Education for Real Life," *Ensign*, Oct. 2002, 18.
15. M. Russell Ballard, "Preparing for the Future," *Ensign*, Sept. 2011, 27.

Now Is the Time to Arise and Shine!

By Elaine S. Dalton

Young Women General President

As daughters of God, you were born to lead.

From my window in the Young Women office, I have a spectacular view of the Salt Lake Temple. Every day I see the angel Moroni standing atop the temple as a shining symbol of not only his faith but ours. I love Moroni because, in a very degenerate society, he remained pure and true. He is my hero. He stood alone. I feel somehow he stands atop the temple today, beckoning us to have courage, to remember who we are, and to be worthy to enter the holy temple—to “arise and shine forth,”¹ to stand above the worldly clamor, and to, as Isaiah prophesied, “Come . . . to the mountain of the Lord”²—the holy temple.

Gathered here today are the Lord’s elect daughters. There is no more influential group standing for truth and righteousness in all the world than the young women and the women of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I see your nobility and know of your divine identity and destiny. You distinguished yourselves in the premortal existence. Your lineage carries with it covenants and promises. You have inherited the spiritual attributes of the faithful patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. A prophet of God once referred to each of you assembled here tonight as “the one bright shining hope”³ of the future. And I agree! In a very challenging world, your light shines brightly. Indeed, these are “days never to be forgotten.”⁴ These are *your* days, and *now* is the time for young women everywhere to “arise and shine forth, that thy light may be a standard for the nations.”⁵

“A standard is a rule of measure by which one determines exactness or perfection.”⁶ We are to be a standard of holiness for all the world to see! The new revised *For the Strength of Youth* booklet contains not only standards to live with exactness but promised blessings if you do so. The words contained in this important booklet are standards for the world, and living these standards will enable you to know what to do to become more like the Savior and to be happy in an ever-darkening world. Living the standards in this booklet will help you qualify for the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost. And in the world in which you are living, you will need that companionship to make critical decisions that will determine much of your future success and happiness. Living these standards will help each of you qualify to enter the Lord’s holy temples and there receive the blessings and power that await you as you make and keep sacred covenants.⁷

When our daughter, Emi, was a little girl, she liked to watch my every move as I got ready for church. After observing my routine, she would comb her hair and put on her dress, and then she would always ask me to put on some “shiney.” The “shiney” she referred to was thick, gooey cream that I used to prevent wrinkles. As requested, I would put it on Emi’s cheeks and lips, and she would then smile and say, “Now we are ready to go!” What Emi didn’t realize is that she already had her “shiney” on. Her face glowed because she was so pure and innocent and good. She had the Spirit with her, and it showed.

I wish every young woman assembled here tonight would know and understand that your beauty—your “shine”—does not lie in makeup, gooey cream, or the latest clothing or hairstyles. It lies in your personal purity. When you live the standards and qualify for the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost, you can have a powerful impact in the world. Your example, even the light in your eyes, will influence others who see your “shine,” and they will want to be like you. Where do you get this light? The Lord is the light, “and the Spirit enlighteneth every man through the world, that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit.”⁸ A divine light comes into your eyes and countenances when you draw close to your Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

That's how we get the "shiney"! And besides, as all of you can see, the "shiney cream" didn't really work on my wrinkles anyway!

The call to "arise and shine forth" is a call to each of you to lead the world in a mighty cause—to raise the standard—and lead this generation in virtue, purity, and temple worthiness. If you desire to make a difference in the world, *you must be different from the world*. I echo the words of President Joseph F. Smith, who said to the women of his day: "It is not for you to be led by the [young] women of the world; it is for you to lead . . . the [young] women of the world, in everything that is . . . purifying to the children of men."⁹ These words ring true today. As daughters of God, you were born to lead.

In the world in which we live, your ability to lead will require the guidance and constant companionship of the Holy Ghost, who will tell you "all things what ye should do"¹⁰ as you recognize and rely on His guidance and promptings. And since the Holy Ghost does not dwell in unclean temples, each of us will need to take inventory of our habits and our hearts. All of us will need to change something—to repent. As King Lamoni's father stated in the Book of Mormon, "I will give away *all* my sins to know thee."¹¹ Are we, you and I, willing to do the same?

A group of youth in Queen Creek, Arizona, determined to "arise and shine forth" and to lead the youth in their community in living the standards in *For the Strength of Youth*. They each wrote something that they felt was holding them back or something they wanted to change in their lives in their journals, and then they literally dug a hole. They came together, tore out the journal page, and threw it into the hole in the earth, just like the people of Ammon did in the Book of Mormon with their weapons of war.¹² Then they buried those pages, and that day they each made a commitment to change. They repented. They determined to arise!

Do you have something in your life that you need to change? You can do this. You can repent because of the Savior's infinite atoning sacrifice. He made it possible for you and me to change, to become pure and clean again, and to become like Him. And He

has promised that when we do, He will remember our sins and mistakes no more.¹³

Sometimes it may seem almost impossible to keep shining. You encounter so many challenges which may obscure the source of all light, which is the Savior. Sometimes the way is difficult, and it may even seem at times that a thick fog obscures the light. Such was the case with a young woman named Florence Chadwick. From the age of 10, Florence discovered that she was a talented swimmer. She swam the English Channel in record time of 13 hours and 20 minutes. Florence loved a challenge, and she later attempted to swim between the coastline of California and Catalina Island—some 21 miles (34 km). On this swim she grew weary after swimming 15 hours. A thick fog set in that obscured the view of the coastline. Her mother was riding alongside her in a boat, and Florence told her mother that she didn't think she could finish. Her mother and her trainer encouraged her to continue, but all she could see was the fog. She abandoned her swim, but once inside the boat, she discovered she had quit within one mile (1.6 km) of the coastline. Later, when she was interviewed and asked why she had abandoned her swim, she confessed that it wasn't the cold water and it wasn't the distance. She said, "I was licked by the fog."¹⁴

Later she attempted the swim again, and once more, a thick fog set in. But this time, she kept going until she successfully reached the coastline. This time when she was asked what made the difference, she said that she kept a mental image of the coastline in her mind through the thick fog and throughout the duration of her swim.¹⁵

For Florence Chadwick, the coastline was her goal. For each of us, the temple is our goal. Young women, stay focused. Don't lose sight of your goals. Don't let the thick fog of moral pollution and the detracting voices of the world keep you from reaching your goals, living the standards, enjoying the companionship of the Holy Ghost, and being worthy to enter holy temples. Retain the vision of the temple—the Savior's holy house—ever in your hearts and minds.

Several weeks ago I stood in the celestial room of the Reno Nevada Temple. The light streaming into that room was brilliant

and was made even more so by the crystal chandelier, which reflected the light on its many carved facets into rainbows of illumination everywhere. It took my breath away as I realized that the Savior is “the light and the life of the world,”¹⁶ that it is *His* light we must hold up and reflect. *We* are the tiny crystals that reflect His light, and in order to do that, we must be clean and free from the dust of the world. As I stood in the temple that day, I heard again in my mind Moroni’s call to us—the daughters of Zion: “Awake, and arise from the dust.”¹⁷ “And touch not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing.”¹⁸ “Awake, and arise . . . , and put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion . . . , that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled.”¹⁹

The promised blessings of the temple extend not only to you but to all generations. As you make the temple your goal, your influence for good will transcend time and place, and the work you perform for those who have gone before will be the fulfillment of prophecy!

Last general conference I thrilled as I listened to Elder David A. Bednar invite each of you to become anxiously engaged in doing your own family history and temple work for those who have passed on without the blessings of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.²⁰ As he issued this invitation to you, my heart leapt inside. In the Doctrine and Covenants we read of “other choice spirits who were reserved to come forth in the fulness of times to take part in laying the foundations of the great latter-day work, including the building of . . . temples and the performance of ordinances therein for the redemption of the dead.”²¹ This is your day, and your work has begun! Now is the time to be worthy of and obtain a temple recommend. As you do this work, you will become saviors on Mount Zion.²²

Elder Russell M. Nelson said of you, “The influence of [the] young women of the Church, like a sleeping giant, will awaken, arise, and inspire the inhabitants of the earth as a mighty force for righteousness.”²³ Young women, arise and take your place in the glorious events that will shape your future and the future of the world. Now is the time!

“High on the mountain top a banner is unfurled. Ye nations, now look up; it waves to all the world!”²⁴ Young women, you are the banner! Be virtuous and pure, seek the companionship of the Holy Ghost, bury your sins and transgressions, maintain your focus, and don’t let the fog of moral pollution obscure your goals. Be worthy to enter the temple now. Put on your “shiny”! I testify with all my heart that God lives and that He will enlighten our lives as we draw close to His Beloved Son—our Savior, Jesus Christ. And I pray that, like Moroni, we will “arise and shine forth, that [our] light may be a standard for the nations!”²⁵ In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Doctrine and Covenants 115:5.
2. Isaiah 2:3; 2 Nephi 12:3.
3. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Standing Strong and Immovable,” *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, Jan. 10, 2004, 20.
4. Oliver Cowdery, in Joseph Smith—History 1:71, note.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 115:5.
6. Ezra Taft Benson, “Strengthen Thy Stakes,” *Tambuli*, Aug. 1991, 4; *Ensign*, Jan. 1991, 2.
7. See Doctrine and Covenants 109:22.
8. Doctrine and Covenants 84:46.
9. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (1998), 184.
10. 2 Nephi 32:5.
11. Alma 22:18; emphasis added.
12. See Alma 24:17.
13. See Doctrine and Covenants 58:42.
14. See Sterling W. Sill, in Conference Report, Apr. 1955, 117.
15. See Randy Alcom, “Florence Chadwick and the Fog,” epm.org/resources/2010/Jan/21/florence-chadwick-and-fog. See also “Florence Chadwick,” in *Encyclopedia of World Biography*, vol. 19 (2004): 64–66; “Navigation Information” and “Swim Successes,” Catalina Channel Swimming Federation, swimcatalina.com, accessed Mar. 27, 2012. Additional varying accounts about Florence Chadwick exist.
16. 3 Nephi 9:18.
17. Moroni 10:31.
18. Moroni 10:30.
19. Moroni 10:31.
20. See David A. Bednar, “The Hearts of the Children Shall Turn,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 24–27.
21. Doctrine and Covenants 138:53–54.
22. See Obadiah 1:21; Doctrine and Covenants 103:9; *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 472–73.
23. Russell M. Nelson, “Daughters of Zion,” *New Era Young Women Special Issue*, YW Nov. 1985, 9.
24. “High on the Mountain Top,” *Hymns*, no. 5.
25. Doctrine and Covenants 115:5.

Believe, Obey, and Endure

By President Thomas S. Monson

Believe that remaining strong and faithful to the truths of the gospel is of utmost importance. I testify that it is!

My dear young sisters, the responsibility to address you is humbling. I pray for divine help, that I may be made equal to such an opportunity.

A mere 20 years ago you had not yet commenced your journey through mortality. You were still in your heavenly home. There you were among those who loved you and were concerned for your eternal well-being. Eventually, earth life became essential to your progress. Farewells were no doubt spoken, and expressions of confidence given. You gained bodies and became mortal, cut off from the presence of your Heavenly Father.

A joyous welcome, however, awaited you here on earth. Those first years were precious, special years. Satan had no power to tempt you, for you had not yet become accountable. You were innocent before God.

Soon you entered that period some have labeled “the terrible teens.” I prefer “the terrific teens.” What a time of opportunity, a season of growth, a semester of development—marked by the acquisition of knowledge and the quest for truth.

No one has described the teenage years as being easy. They are often years of insecurity, of feeling as though you just don’t measure up, of trying to find your place with your peers, of trying to fit in. This is a time when you are becoming more independent—and perhaps desire more freedom than your parents are willing to give you right now. They are also prime years when Satan will tempt you and will do his utmost to entice you from the path which will lead you back to that heavenly

home from which you came and back to your loved ones there and back to your Heavenly Father.

The world around you is not equipped to provide the help you need to make it through this often-treacherous journey. So many in our society today seem to have slipped from the moorings of safety and drifted from the harbor of peace.

Permissiveness, immorality, pornography, drugs, the power of peer pressure—all these and more—cause many to be tossed about on a sea of sin and crushed on the jagged reefs of lost opportunities, forfeited blessings, and shattered dreams.

Is there a way to safety? Is there an escape from threatened destruction? The answer is a resounding *yes!* I counsel you to look to the lighthouse of the Lord. I have said it before; I will say it again: there is no fog so dense, no night so dark, no gale so strong, no mariner so lost but what the lighthouse of the Lord can rescue. It beckons through the storms of life. It calls, “*This way to safety. This way to home.*” It sends forth signals of light easily seen and never failing. If followed, those signals will guide you back to your heavenly home.

I wish to talk with you tonight about three essential signals from the Lord’s lighthouse which will help you to return to that Father who eagerly awaits your triumphant homecoming. Those three signals are *believe, obey, and endure.*

First, I mention a signal which is basic and essential: *believe.* Believe that you are a daughter of Heavenly Father, that He loves you, and that you are here for a glorious purpose—to gain your eternal salvation. Believe that remaining strong and faithful to the truths of the gospel is of utmost importance. I testify that it is!

My young friends, believe in the words you say each week as you recite the Young Women theme. Think about the meaning of those words. There is truth there. Strive always to live the values which are set forth. Believe, as your theme states, that if you accept and act upon those values, you will be prepared to strengthen your home and your family, to make and keep sacred covenants, to receive the ordinances of the temple, and to eventually enjoy the blessings of exaltation. These are beautiful gospel truths, and by following them, you will be happier

throughout your life here and hereafter than you will be if you disregard them.

Most of you were taught the truths of the gospel from the time you were a toddler. You were taught by loving parents and caring teachers. The truths they imparted to you helped you gain a testimony; you believed what you were taught. Although that testimony can continue to be fed spiritually and to grow as you study, as you pray for guidance, and as you attend your Church meetings each week, it is up to you to keep that testimony alive. Satan will try with all his might to destroy it. Throughout your entire life you will need to nurture it. As with the flame of a brightly burning fire, your testimony—if not continually fed—will fade to glowing embers and then cool completely. You must not let this happen.

Besides attending your Sunday meetings and your weeknight activities, when you have the chance to be involved in seminary, whether in the early morning or in released-time classes, take advantage of that opportunity. Many of you are attending seminary now. As with anything in life, much of what you take from your seminary experience depends on your attitude and your willingness to be taught. May your attitude be one of humility and a desire to learn. How grateful I am for the opportunity I had as a teenager to attend early-morning seminary, for it played a vital role in my development and the development of my testimony. Seminary can change lives.

Some years ago I was on a board of directors with a fine man who had been extremely successful in life. I was impressed with his integrity and his loyalty to the Church. I learned that he had gained a testimony and had joined the Church because of seminary. When he married, his wife had been a lifelong member of the Church. He belonged to no church. Through the years and despite her efforts, he showed no interest in attending church with his wife and children. And then he began driving two of his daughters to early-morning seminary. He would remain in the car while they had their class, and then he would drive them to school. One day it was raining, and one of his daughters said, “Come in, Dad. You can sit in the hall.” He accepted the invitation. The door to the classroom was open, and he began to

listen. His heart was touched. For the rest of that school year, he attended seminary with his daughters, which led eventually to his membership and a lifetime of activity in the Church. Let seminary help build and strengthen your testimony.

There will be times when you will face challenges which might jeopardize your testimony, or you may neglect it as you pursue other interests. I plead with you to keep it strong. It is your responsibility, and yours alone, to keep its flame burning brightly. Effort is required, but it is effort you will never, ever regret. I'm reminded of the words of a song written by Julie de Azevedo Hanks. Referring to her testimony, she wrote:

*Through the winds of change
Encircled by the clouds of pain
I guard it with my life
I need the warmth—I need the light
Though the storm will rage
I stand against the pounding rain
I remain
A keeper of the flame.¹*

May you believe and then may you keep the flame of your testimony burning brightly, come what may.

Next, young women, may you *obey*. Obey your parents. Obey the laws of God. They are given to us by a loving Heavenly Father. When they are obeyed, our lives will be more fulfilling, less complicated. Our challenges and problems will be easier to bear. We will receive the Lord's promised blessings. He has said, "The Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind; and the willing and obedient shall eat the good of the land of Zion in these last days."²

You have but one life to live. Keep it as free from trouble as you can. You will be tempted, sometimes by individuals you had thought friends.

Some years ago I spoke to a Mia Maid adviser who told me of an experience she had with one of the young women in her class. This young woman had been tempted time and time again to leave the pathway of truth and follow the detour of sin. Through the constant persuasion of some of her friends at school, she had

finally agreed to follow such a detour. The plan was set: she would tell her parents she was going to her activity night for Young Women. She planned, however, to be there only long enough for her girlfriends and their dates to pick her up. They would then attend a party where alcoholic beverages would be consumed and where the behavior would be in complete violation of what this young woman knew was right.

The teacher had prayed for inspiration in helping all her girls but especially this particular young woman, who seemed so uncertain about her commitment to the gospel. The teacher had received inspiration that night to abandon what she had previously planned and to speak to the girls about remaining morally clean. As she began sharing her thoughts and feelings, the young woman in question checked her watch often to make sure she didn't miss her rendezvous with her friends. However, as the discussion progressed, her heart was touched, her conscience awakened, and her determination renewed. When it came, she ignored the repeated sound of the automobile horn summoning her. She remained throughout the evening with her teacher and the other girls in the class. The temptation to detour from God's approved way had been averted. Satan had been frustrated. The young woman remained after the others had left in order to thank her teacher for the lesson and to let her know how it had helped her avoid what might have been a tragic outcome. A teacher's prayer had been answered.

I subsequently learned that because she had made her decision not to go with her friends that night—some of the most popular girls and boys at school—the young woman was shunned by them and for many months had no friends at school. They couldn't accept that she was unwilling to do the things they did. It was an extremely difficult and lonely period for her, but she remained steadfast and eventually gained friends who shared her standards. Now, several years later, she has a temple marriage and four beautiful children. How different her life could have been. Our decisions determine our destiny.

Precious young women, make every decision you contemplate pass this test: "What does it do to me? What does it do for me?" And let your code of conduct emphasize not "What

will others think?" but rather "What will I think of myself?" Be influenced by that still, small voice. Remember that one with authority placed his hands on your head at the time of your confirmation and said, "Receive the Holy Ghost." Open your hearts, even your very souls, to the sound of that special voice which testifies of truth. As the prophet Isaiah promised, "Thine ears shall hear a word . . . saying, This is the way, walk ye in it."³

The tenor of our times is permissiveness. Magazines and television shows portray the stars of the movie screen, the heroes of the athletic field—those whom many young people long to emulate—as disregarding the laws of God and flaunting sinful practices, seemingly with no ill effect. Don't you believe it! There is a time of reckoning—even a balancing of the ledger. Every Cinderella has her midnight—if not in this life, then in the next. Judgment Day will come for all. Are you prepared? Are you pleased with your own performance?

If any has stumbled in her journey, I promise you that there is a way back. The process is called repentance. Our Savior died to provide you and me that blessed gift. Though the path is difficult, the promise is real. Said the Lord: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."⁴ "And I will remember [them] no more."⁵

My beloved young sisters, you have the precious gift of agency. I plead with you to choose to obey.

Finally, may you *endure*. What does it mean to endure? I love this definition: *to withstand with courage*. Courage may be necessary for you to believe; it will at times be necessary as you obey. It will most certainly be required as you endure until that day when you will leave this mortal existence.

I have spoken over the years with many individuals who have told me, "I have so many problems, such real concerns. I'm overwhelmed with the challenges of life. What can I do?" I have offered to them, and I now offer to you, this specific suggestion: seek heavenly guidance one day at a time. Life by the yard is hard; by the inch it's a cinch. Each of us can be true for just one day—and then one more and then one more after that—until we've lived a lifetime guided by the Spirit, a lifetime close to the Lord, a lifetime of good deeds and righteousness. The Savior

promised, “Look unto me, and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life.”⁶

For this purpose have you come into mortality, my young friends. There is nothing more important than the goal you strive to attain—even eternal life in the kingdom of your Father.

You are precious, precious daughters of our Heavenly Father sent to earth at this day and time for a purpose. You have been withheld until this very hour. Wonderful, glorious things are in store for you if you will only believe, obey, and endure. May this be your blessing, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, amen.

Notes

1. Julie de Azevedo Hanks, “Keeper of the Flame,” *Treasure the Truth* (compact disc, 1997).
2. Doctrine and Covenants 64:34.
3. Isaiah 30:21.
4. Isaiah 1:18.
5. Jeremiah 31:34.
6. 3 Nephi 15:9.