

# HE LIVED AS HE TAUGHT

*Experiences from the life of President George Albert Smith demonstrate that he not only believed the gospel—he lived it.*

**By Ted Barnes**  
Curriculum Department

Near the end of a stressful day, John A. Widtsoe sat in his office, “rather tired after the day’s work.” He was facing a controversial problem, and he was feeling the heavy weight of his responsibilities. “I was weary,” he said.

“Just then there was a knock upon the door, and in walked George Albert Smith. He said, ‘I am on the way home after my day’s work. I thought of you and the problems that you are expected to solve. I came in to comfort you and to bless you.’

“... I shall never forget it. We talked together for awhile; we parted, he went home. My heart was lifted. I was weary no longer.”

Recalling this experience many years later as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Elder Widtsoe (1872–1952) said: “That was the way of George Albert Smith.

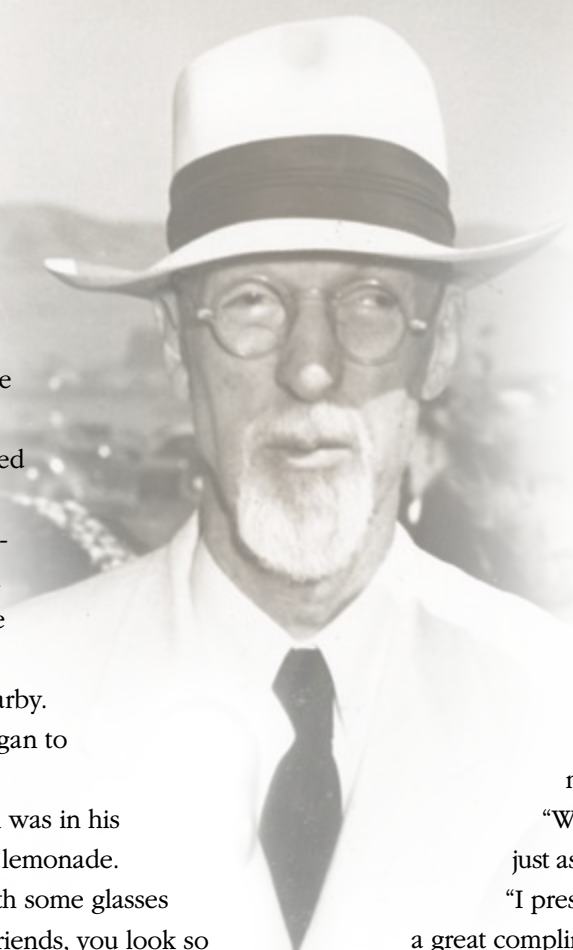
... He gave of his own time, his own strength.”<sup>1</sup>

George Albert Smith (1870–1951), who served as the eighth President of the Church, from 1945 to 1951, believed that if we truly have a testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ, it will manifest itself in our lives—particularly in the way we treat one another. “A correct and consistent life,” he taught, “is the strongest testimony that we will be able to bear of the truth of this work.”<sup>2</sup>

In *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: George Albert Smith*, the Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society curriculum for 2012, President Smith’s testimony is expressed powerfully—both through his teachings and through stories from his life. The following are some examples of these stories and teachings.

## **The Power of Kindness**

One hot summer day, some workers were doing repairs to the street outside



President Smith's home. As the work intensified and the sun grew hotter, the workers started using obscene and profane words. Soon one of the neighbors approached and scolded the workers for their offensive language, pointing out that George Albert Smith lived nearby. Unimpressed, the workers began to swear even more.

Meanwhile, President Smith was in his kitchen preparing a pitcher of lemonade. He brought it out on a tray with some glasses and said to the workers, "My friends, you look so hot and tired. Why don't you come and sit under my trees here and have a cool drink?"

Humbled and grateful, the workers accepted his offer, and after their welcome break they finished their work respectfully and quietly.<sup>3</sup>

Experiences such as this demonstrate George Albert Smith's conviction that we can "meet our problems in the spirit of love and kindness toward all."<sup>4</sup> "There are those who will make mistakes," he said. "There are those among us today that have gone astray, but they are the children of our Lord and he loves them. He has given to you and to me the right to go to them in kindness and love and with patience and with a desire to bless, seek to win them from the mistakes that they are making. It is not my privilege to judge. . . . But it is my privilege, if I see them doing the wrong thing, to in some way, if possible, turn them back into the pathway that leads to eternal life in the Celestial kingdom."<sup>5</sup>

"What a joy, what a comfort, what a satisfaction can be added to the lives of our neighbors and friends through kindness. How I would like to write that word in capital letters and emblazon it in the air. Kindness is the power that God has given us to unlock hard hearts and subdue stubborn souls."<sup>6</sup>

## Sharing the Gospel

President Smith considered sharing the gospel to be "the ultimate kindness."<sup>7</sup> He acknowledged and rejoiced in the goodness he found in other churches, but he knew that the restored gospel has something unique and valuable to offer humankind.

Once while he was serving as a mission president, someone said to him, "Well, from all I can learn, your church is just as good as any other church."

"I presume he thought he was paying us a great compliment," President Smith noted. "But I said to him: 'If the Church I represent here is not of more importance to the children of men than any other church, then I am mistaken in my duty here.'"<sup>8</sup>

One reason our message is so important, President Smith taught, is the fact that "the Latter-day Saints are the only ones who bear the authority of our Heavenly Father to administer in the ordinances of the Gospel. The world has need of us."<sup>9</sup>

Because of this, President Smith wanted Latter-day Saints to feel "an intense and enthusiastic desire to divide with all of our Father's children the good things that he has so generously bestowed upon us."<sup>10</sup>

"I feel sometimes," he said, "that we do not sufficiently sense the importance of [the gospel], that we do not teach it with the earnestness it demands."<sup>11</sup>

A close friend observed how President Smith exemplified "earnestness" in sharing the gospel: "On several occasions I have had the privilege of traveling on the train with President Smith. Each time I observed that as soon as the journey was well underway, he would take a few gospel tracts from his bag, put them into his pocket, and then move about among the passengers. In his friendly, agreeable manner he would soon make the acquaintance of a fellow traveler, and in a short time I would hear him relating



the story of the founding of the Church by the Prophet Joseph Smith or telling of the exodus of the Saints from Nauvoo and their trials and difficulties in crossing the plains to Utah or explaining some of the gospel principles to his new-found friend. Conversation after conversation would follow with one passenger after another until the journey was ended. In my entire acquaintance with President Smith, which has extended more than forty years, I have learned that wherever he is, he is first and foremost a missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”<sup>12</sup>

### Teaching Our Children

George Albert Smith and his wife, Lucy, took seriously the divine mandate to “bring up [their] children in light and truth” (D&C 93:40). Their daughter Edith told of one occasion when her father took advantage of a teaching opportunity. She had taken the streetcar home from a piano lesson, and the conductor neglected to collect her fare. “Somehow he passed me by,” she recounted, “and I reached my destination still holding my nickel in my hand, and frankly quite elated that I had made the trip free.

“ . . . I ran gleefully to Father to tell him about my good fortune. He listened to my story patiently. I was beginning to think I was a great success. . . .

“When I had finished my tale, Father said, ‘But, darling, even if the conductor doesn’t know about this, you know and I know and Heavenly Father knows. So, there are still three of us who must be satisfied in seeing that you pay in full for value received.’”

Edith returned to the street corner and paid her fare. She said later, “I am indeed



**President Smith shows the Book of Mormon to Many Turquoise (left) and Manuelito Begay.**

thankful for a Father who was wise enough to kindly point out the error to me, because if it had been overlooked, I could have thought he approved.”<sup>13</sup>

President Smith taught Church members that love has the power to inspire our children to live righteously: “Teach your children to observe the moral law. Surround them as by the arms of your love, that they may have no desire whatsoever to partake of the temptations to evil that surround them on every hand.”<sup>14</sup>

“It is our duty—I should say it is our privilege as well as our duty to take sufficient time to surround our children with safeguards and to so love them and earn their love that they will be glad to listen to our advice and counsel.”<sup>15</sup>

### Eternal Families

George Albert and Lucy Smith had been married for about 40 years when Lucy began a prolonged struggle with frail health. Though he worried about her and tried to comfort her as much as he could, President Smith’s duties as a General Authority often required him to be away from home. One day after President Smith gave a talk at a funeral, someone handed him a note telling him to return home immediately. He later wrote in his journal:

“I left the chapel at once but my Darling

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wife had breathed her last before I arrived at home. She was passing while I was talking at the funeral. I am of course bereft of a devoted helpmeet and will be lonely without her.”

“While my family are greatly distressed,” he continued, “we are comforted by the assurance of a reunion with [her] if we remain faithful. . . . The Lord is most kind and has taken away every feeling of death, for which I am exceedingly grateful.”<sup>16</sup>

President Smith drew strength and comfort from his testimony of the plan of salvation and the temple ordinances that seal families eternally. He taught:

“The assurance that our relationship here as parents and children, as husbands and wives will continue in heaven, and that this is but the beginning of a great and glorious kingdom that our Father has destined we shall inherit on the other side, fills us with hope and joy.

“If I were to think, as so many think, that now that my beloved wife and my beloved parents are gone, that they have passed out of my life forever and that I shall never see them again, it would deprive me of one of the greatest joys that I have in life: the contemplation of meeting them again, and receiving their welcome and their affection, and of thanking them from the depths of a grateful heart for all they have done for me.”<sup>17</sup>

“When we realize that death is only one of the steps that the children of God shall take throughout eternity, and that it is according to his plan, it robs death of its sting and brings us face to face with the reality of eternal life. Many families have been called upon to say goodbye temporarily to those they love. When such passings occur, they disturb us, if we will let them, and thus bring great sorrow into our lives. But if our spiritual eyes could be opened and we could see, we would be comforted, I am sure, with what our vision would behold. The Lord has not left us without hope. On the contrary he has given us every assurance of eternal happiness, if we will accept his advice and counsel while here in mortality.

“This is not an idle dream. These are facts.”<sup>18</sup>



**Top: President Smith with his son George Albert Smith Jr. Above: A 1947 issue of Time magazine featured an article about President Smith and the Church.**

## Love and Service

President Smith was perhaps best known for the love he showed to others. He believed love to be the essence of the gospel. He told the Saints, “If the gospel of Jesus Christ, as delivered to you, has not planted that feeling of love in your hearts for your fellow men, then I want to say that you have not enjoyed the full fruition of that wonderful gift that came to earth when this Church was organized.”<sup>19</sup>

As President of the Church, President Smith blessed the lives of thousands through worldwide welfare efforts and other initiatives. Nevertheless, he still found time for smaller, more personal acts of service. One of his associates, Elder Richard L. Evans (1906–71) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, wrote: “It is not uncommon to see him, before and after office hours, walking hospital halls, visiting room after room, blessing, encouraging, and cheering with his unexpected appearances in those places where his comforting and reassuring presence is so gratefully welcome. . . . It is characteristic of him to go wherever he feels that he can give help and encouragement.”<sup>20</sup>

President Thomas S. Monson shared this example of President Smith’s love: “On a cold winter morning, the street cleaning crew [in Salt Lake City] was removing large chunks of ice from the street gutters. The regular crew was assisted by temporary laborers who desperately needed the work. One such wore only a lightweight sweater and was suffering from the cold. A slender man with a well-groomed beard stopped by the crew and asked the worker, ‘You need more than that sweater on a morning like this. Where is your coat?’ The man replied that he had no coat

to wear. The visitor then removed his own overcoat, handed it to the man and said, ‘This coat is yours. It is heavy wool and will keep you warm. I just work across the street.’ The street was South Temple. The good Samaritan who walked into the Church Administration Building to his daily work and without his coat was President George Albert Smith of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. His selfless act of generosity revealed his tender heart. Surely he was his brother’s keeper.”<sup>21</sup>

## The Details of Daily Life

Whether sharing his faith with fellow train passengers or giving a cold street worker the coat off his back, President George Albert Smith consistently bore his testimony through his actions as well as his teachings. A prominent theme that runs throughout *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: George Albert Smith* is that the gospel of Jesus Christ should have a powerful effect on our lives.

As one observer said of President Smith: “His religion is not doctrine in cold storage. It is not theory. It means more to him than a beautiful plan to be admired. It is more than a philosophy of life. To one of his practical turn of mind, religion is the spirit in which a man lives, in which he does things, if it be only to say a kind word or give a cup of cold water. His religion must find expression in deeds. It must carry over into the details of daily life.”<sup>22</sup>

President J. Reuben Clark Jr. (1871–1961), one of his counselors in the First Presidency, summarized President Smith’s life with these words: “He was one of those few people of whom you can say he lived as he taught.”<sup>23</sup> ■

## NOTES

1. John A. Widtsoe, in Conference Report, Apr. 1951, 99; see also *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: George Albert Smith* (2011), xxxvii–xxxviii.
2. *Teachings: George Albert Smith*, 9.
3. See *Teachings: George Albert Smith*, 223.
4. *Teachings: George Albert Smith*, 223.
5. *Teachings: George Albert Smith*, 227.
6. *Teachings: George Albert Smith*, 228.
7. *Teachings: George Albert Smith*, 124.
8. *Teachings: George Albert Smith*, 152.
9. *Teachings: George Albert Smith*, 125.
10. *Teachings: George Albert Smith*, 129.
11. *Teachings: George Albert Smith*, 150.
12. Preston Nibley, in *Teachings: George Albert Smith*, 123.
13. See *Teachings: George Albert Smith*, 235.
14. *Teachings: George Albert Smith*, 240.
15. *Teachings: George Albert Smith*, 228.
16. See *Teachings: George Albert Smith*, xxvii.
17. *Teachings: George Albert Smith*, 83–84.
18. *Teachings: George Albert Smith*, 76–77.
19. *Teachings: George Albert Smith*, 14.
20. Richard L. Evans, in *Teachings: George Albert Smith*, 11–13.
21. Thomas S. Monson, in *Teachings: George Albert Smith*, 13.
22. Bryant S. Hinckley, in *Teachings: George Albert Smith*, 2.
23. J. Reuben Clark Jr., in *Teachings: George Albert Smith*, 3.