





**By Elder
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Served as a General
Authority Seventy
from 2006 to 2015

PRACTICE

Pure Religion

If you want to be happy, feel the Holy Ghost, and grow closer to the Savior, then practice pure religion.

A couple of years ago, a young man I'll call John came to my office shortly after he had returned from his mission. "Elder Clarke, I need help," he said to me with great concern. "I loved my mission. It changed me. However, I am losing some of those sacred and special feelings that I felt in the mission field. What can I do to feel like I felt in the mission field?"

I have seen this happen many times. What he was asking was, "What can I do to be happy, feel the Holy Ghost, and be close to the Savior?" This is a question we all should ask every day.

On that afternoon in my office, we turned to James 1:27 and read, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

Next we read Alma 34:28: "If ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance, if ye have, to those who stand in need—I say unto you, if ye do not any of these things, behold, your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing, and ye are as hypocrites who do deny the faith."

Then we reviewed the story in the Gospel of John in which Peter and other disciples had gone fishing and caught nothing but then were told by the Savior to

move their net to the other side of the boat and caught 153 fish. After they had eaten, Peter and the Savior talked. The Savior knew He was instructing this soon-to-be prophet and President of the Church for one of the last times.

“Lovest thou me?” the Savior asked.

Peter answered, “Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.”

Then the Savior said, “Feed my lambs.”

The Savior asked the same question two more times and then instructed: “Feed my sheep” (see John 21:3–17).

Peter was really being instructed to practice pure religion, or to care for the people. The prophet of God today also cares for and loves the people. President Thomas S. Monson is a great example of one who practices pure religion. He has spent his entire life loving and caring for people.

I have seen many returned missionaries like my friend John. If you ask them why they loved their missions, almost always they will say because of their love for the people. The day missionaries start to care more about

others than themselves, they become happy. It is that way for all of us. Our lives will always be happier if we care for and love others.

The opposite of caring for others is thinking about oneself: my car, my studies, my job, my problems. When it is always about us, our connection with heaven isn’t as strong as it could be.

I told John that if he would practice pure religion, he would be happy and feel as he had felt on his mission. Likewise, if *you* want to be happy, feel the Holy Ghost, and grow closer to the Savior, then practice pure religion. From the scriptures above we learn four key practices that can be defined as pure religion.

1. Visit and Care for Widows

John went back to college and acted upon what we had discussed. Later he sent me an email in which he shared his experience reading inspirational stories from the Church magazines to elderly people at an assisted-care facility.



“Many individuals felt a great amount of love and support from the Savior as the Spirit testified of simple truths and testimonies,” he wrote. “I had never known I was capable of feeling such love from and for strangers with whom I had little connection. But I felt the Savior’s love for them, for those kind souls. It appeared clear to me that I would meet these individuals—now riddled by dementia and physical ailments—on the other side. I would see their husbands and wives, who have been looking over them from the other side of the veil. I felt very much the presence of my grandfather—whom I had never met—as I sat with my grandmother, and his spirit strengthened me and supported me. I knew he was thankful for my simple visit.”

He continued: “Who knew that I could find such tender mercies? It seems so meaningless to come home after something like that and just turn on the TV or tune out in some other way. It has changed me to realize that these tender experiences are available at all moments of the day as we, as Saints, strive to focus and help others in some way.”

You can do this too, and the Lord will bless you as He blessed John.

2. Help Orphans

There are many orphans throughout the world. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could connect with or write to one regularly?

When our son, Nate, returned from his mission, he had the same feelings as my friend John. Nate decided to volunteer to become a mentor in a program that matches adults with children in need of supportive one-on-one relationships. That service changed his college experience.



Now that he is married, Nate and his wife, Carla, have “adopted” again through the program. It has been a great blessing for them in their marriage to share what they have with those in need.

When my wife, Mary Anne, and I served in the Bolivia Santa Cruz Mission, we had a missionary who was an orphan boy. He had no family. The Lord assigned him to be Elder Hawkins’s trainer. I don’t think he was the best trainer, but Elder Hawkins was the best companion for an orphan boy who had become one of the Lord’s missionaries.

Elder Hawkins’s parents wrote to this missionary during his mission and have continued to write to him for the past 15 years. Because of Elder Hawkins and his family, this orphan boy has been loved and cared for and is now happily married, employed, and active in the gospel of Jesus Christ. We all can help change orphan children.

Does the Lord trust us to be an answer to someone else’s prayer? Can He count on us to follow the promptings of the Holy Ghost?



3. Care for the Poor and Needy

The scriptures constantly remind us of the importance of helping the poor and the needy. We all have this responsibility.¹ One way we can increase our help to the poor and the needy is to pay a generous fast offering. President Brigham Young (1801–77) said:

“The first year that I came into this valley I had not flour enough to last my family until harvest . . . , and persons were coming to my house every day for bread. I had the blues about [it] one day; I went down to the old fort and by the time I got back to my house I was completely cured. I said to my wife, ‘Do not let a person come here for food and go away empty handed, for if you do we shall suffer before harvest; but if you give to every individual that comes we shall have enough to last us through.’ . . .

“I intend to keep doing so, that my bread may hold out, for if I do not I shall come short.

“Do you believe that principle? I know it is true, because I have proven it so many times.”²

The following experience was posted on a Christian website by a physician in Colorado, USA, who coasted into a gas station after his car had sputtered and died. As he prepared to call a tow truck, he saw a woman, whose old car was parked by a gas pump, slip and fall down.

“I got out to see if she was okay. When I got there, it looked more like she had been overcome by sobs than that she had fallen; she was [a] young woman who looked really haggard with dark circles under her eyes. She dropped something as I helped her up, and I picked it up to give it to her. It was a nickel.

“At that moment, everything came into focus for me: the crying woman, the ancient [car] crammed full of stuff with three kids in the back (one in a car seat), and the gas pump reading [U.S.] \$4.95. I asked her if she was okay and if she needed help, and she just kept saying, ‘I don’t want my kids to see me crying.’”

Understanding her situation, the physician took out his credit card, filled up her car with gas, and then bought two big bags of food and some gift certificates for her and her children at a fast-food restaurant next to the gas station.

“She told me her name, and that she lived in Kansas City [Missouri, USA],” he said. “Her boyfriend [had] left two months ago, and she had not been able to make ends meet. . . . In desperation [she] had finally called her parents, with whom she had not spoken in about five years. They lived in California and said she could come live with them and try to get on her feet there. So she packed up everything she owned in the car.”

The doctor gave her a hug and offered a prayer for her safety on the road. As he walked to his car, the woman asked, “Are you like an angel or something?”

The doctor replied, “Sometimes God uses regular people.”

Then he observed: “It was so incredible to be a part of someone else’s miracle. And of course, . . . when I got in my car it started right away and got me home with no problem. I’ll put it in the shop tomorrow to check, but I suspect the mechanic won’t find anything wrong.”³

Does the Lord trust us to be an answer to someone else’s prayer? Can He count on us to follow the promptings of the Holy Ghost? The more we follow the Spirit’s promptings, the more opportunities the Lord will present to us to be the answer to someone else’s prayer.

4. Feed His Lambs and Sheep

When Jesus had His conversation with Peter, His first counsel was, “Feed my lambs.” The Savior knows that if we feed the lambs, we won’t have to look for lost sheep. Some of us may have younger brothers or sisters, nephews or nieces, or other people we know who need help. May we be great examples for them, and may we find the lambs who need our help.

Will you find and help a lamb? Will you, as a shepherd, be trustworthy enough to care for the lambs and the sheep, as the Savior has asked us to do?

The question the Savior asked of Peter could be asked of each of us: “Lovest thou

me?” As we practice pure religion by visiting and caring for widows, helping orphans, caring for the poor and needy, and feeding His lambs and sheep, we will show the Savior that we love Him! As we do this, we will be happy, feel the Holy Ghost, and feel closer to Him. ■

From a devotional address, “Pure Religion,” given at Brigham Young University on January 13, 2015. For the full address, go to speeches.byu.edu.

NOTES

1. See Jeffrey R. Holland, “Are We Not All Beggars?” *Ensign*, Nov. 2014, 40–42.
2. Brigham Young, “Remarks,” *Deseret News*, June 18, 1856, 116.
3. “Friends Are God’s Way of Taking Care of Us,” lisburn.com/stories/friends_are_gods_way.html.



WE TOO MUST GIVE

“Although I may not be my brother’s keeper, I am my brother’s brother, and ‘because I have been given much, I too must give.’ ”

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Are We Not All Beggars?” *Ensign*, Nov. 2014, 42.

