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Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

PRESIDENT DALLIN H. OAKS: Following the Lord's Ways

When President Oaks knows what the Lord wants him to do—he does it.

After being called to serve as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in April of 1984, Elder Dallin H. Oaks reflected deeply on his new role and the inevitable changes that would occur in his life.

This was not the first time Elder Oaks had been asked to leave his personal and professional “nets” (see Matthew 4:18–20). In 1970 he resigned his faculty position at the University of Chicago Law School in response to the invitation from Church leaders to become the president of Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, USA. He thoroughly enjoyed teaching, conducting research, and interacting with law students in Chicago. Yet he responded in faith to the request to serve as the eighth president of BYU.

Elder Oaks faced a similar situation in 1984 following his call to the Twelve, as he again left a position and work that he loved as a supreme court justice in the state of Utah. However, this change was different.

In 1970, Elder Oaks reasonably might have thought he would return to his legal career following his service at BYU, which in fact he eventually did. But the call in 1984 was distinctive—a

consecrated commitment of his whole soul and entire life to the Lord. The eternal importance and worldwide scope of his new responsibilities truly were overwhelming.

Elder Oaks described his innermost thoughts about this important transition:

“During this period of introspection, contemplating the way I would spend the rest of my life, I asked myself what kind of an apostle I would be. Would I be a lawyer who had been called to be

an apostle, or would I be an apostle who used to be a lawyer? I concluded that the answer to this question depended upon whether I would try to shape my calling to my own personal qualifications and





experience, or whether I would undertake the painful process of trying to shape myself to my calling.

“Would I try to perform my calling in the world’s ways, or would I try to determine and follow the Lord’s ways?”

“I made up my mind that I would try to change myself to fit my calling, that I would try to measure up to the qualifications and spiritual stature of an apostle. That is a challenge for a lifetime.”¹

The Lord’s divine grace, the experiences of life, a supportive family, and the personal qualities and discipline developed through diligent

The oldest of three children, Dallin (far left) was only seven years old when his father passed away. Growing up, he took violin lessons for a few months but helped his widowed mother for many years.

study and learning, hard work, and loving service have enabled President Oaks to “follow the Lord’s ways” and truly become a valiant Apostle who used to be an attorney.

Many spiritual gifts are evident in the life and ministry of President Dallin H. Oaks.

Faith in the Savior

President Oaks is blessed with the spiritual gift to know by the power of the Holy Ghost that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (see D&C 46:13–14). He teaches the doctrine of the Savior with clarity and testifies of Him with conviction. The Lord is his light in every aspect of his life.

When Dallin H. Oaks knows what the Lord wants him to do—he does it.

Through his teachings over many years, President Oaks has helped Church members to understand more fully the purpose and importance of the Father’s plan of salvation, the Savior’s Atonement, priesthood authority and keys, the sacred ordinance of the sacrament, the process of not merely “doing” but “becoming,” the distinctions in our lives among good, better, and best, and numerous other gospel principles. His simple and orderly approach to gospel learning has strengthened the faith of Latter-day Saints around the world.



Integrity

President Oaks is a man of integrity. His beliefs and behavior are grounded in gospel principles, and he lives what he believes. Expediency is never an option for him because he is determined to do what is right, even if a course of action does not advance his personal reputation or viewpoint. There are no shortcuts in his life—do things right or not at all.

His integrity is reflected in his willingness to tackle challenging issues and assignments. And he does so in a masterful way—the Lord’s way. He has taught forthrightly about topics such as defending the traditional family, addressing threats to religious liberty, protecting children from the selfish sins of adults, and decrying the evils of pornography.

Meekness

The personal and professional accomplishments of President Oaks are exceptional by any standard. Yet President Oaks exhibits meekness and a spiritual receptivity to learning both from the Holy Ghost and from

President Oaks and his late wife, June, have four girls and two boys (the youngest was born after the photo above was taken).

Dallin Oaks worked as a radio announcer and transmitter engineer and met June while announcing high school basketball games as a college freshman. They were married in 1952.



people with widely diverse backgrounds and experiences.

In one of our quorum meetings, Elder Oaks expressed a strong opinion about a course of action that he believed should be pursued. The reasons he articulated were convincing, and his knowledge about the issue was extensive. His arguments in favor of the action were compelling.

As we counseled together, a member of the Twelve with considerably less seniority expressed agreement with the basic course of action but registered a reservation about the

proposed timing. Elder Oaks could have countered the concern with a response such as “I believe I have more experience with this matter than you do.” But he did not. With no hint of defensiveness or indignation, Elder Oaks asked his quorum member, “Would you please help me understand your reservation about the timing?”

After listening intently to his apostolic associate, Elder Oaks pondered for a moment and then said, “The point you have made is important. I had not considered fully the timing

implications of this action in the way you have, and I am persuaded that the proposal should be reworked based on what we have learned in this discussion.”

Elder Oaks listened to and learned from his fellow quorum member and then walked in the meekness of the Lord’s Spirit (see D&C 19:23) to accomplish the desired outcome. For Dallin H. Oaks, the issue is never about what he wants; it is always about what the Lord wants and about following His ways.

Discernment

President Oaks also is blessed with the spiritual gift of discernment and the ability to recognize the long-term consequences

of proposals, decisions, and actions. This capacity is manifested in a question he often asks himself and others: “Where will it lead?”² A person simply cannot talk or counsel in council with President Oaks and not recognize immediately how this ability has benefited countless individuals and families and the entire Church during his lifetime of service to the Lord.

On a summer night in 1970, President Oaks had a frightening encounter with an armed robber on Chicago’s South Side as he returned to his parked car. His wife, June, was waiting for him in the vehicle.

“Give me your money,” the young mugger demanded.

“I don’t have any,” Brother Oaks replied, showing him his empty wallet.

“Give me your car keys,” he ordered. The keys were locked in the car with Sister Oaks. “Tell her to open the car,” the robber insisted. Brother Oaks said no.

The robber threatened, “Do it, or I’ll kill you.” Brother Oaks said firmly, “I won’t do it.” While the robber repeated his demands and threats, Brother Oaks saw an opportunity to wrestle the gun away from the young man. As President Oaks described in a 1992 general conference message, “Just as I was about to make my move, I had a unique experience. I did not see anything or hear anything, but I *knew* something. I knew what would happen if I grabbed that gun. We would struggle, and I would turn the gun into that young man’s chest. It would fire, and he would die. I also understood that I must not have the blood of



1932: Born in Provo, Utah, USA

1949: Joined the Utah National Guard one year before the Korean War

1952: Married June Dixon in the Salt Lake Temple

1954: Graduated from Brigham Young University with a degree in accounting

1957: Graduated from the University of Chicago Law School

1957–58: Served as clerk for U.S. Supreme Court chief justice Earl Warren

1958–61: Practiced law in Chicago, Illinois, USA

1961–70: Taught law at the University of Chicago Law School

1971–80: Served as president of Brigham Young University

1980–84: Served as a justice in the Utah Supreme Court

1984: Called to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

1998: June Dixon Oaks, mother of their six children, passed away

2000: Married Kristen McMains in the Salt Lake Temple

2002–4: Served as Area President in the Philippines

2018: Called as First Counselor in the First Presidency



that young man on my conscience for the rest of my life.”³

This miraculous manifestation of the gift of discernment enabled President Oaks to resolve the confrontation and ultimately saved his own life and the life of the young robber.

More recently, in a meeting of the Missionary Executive Council, which Elder Oaks chaired at the time, we counseled together about a proposal related to the missionaries serving in a particular area of the world. After all council members had expressed their views on the matter, Elder Oaks asked several questions and summarized what had been learned. He then stated, “I do not feel we are yet settled on this matter. We should wait upon the Lord and not make a final decision now.”

Events a few months later dramatically highlighted the inspiration that attended that decision to wait. The council, acting under the inspired leadership of Elder Oaks, had been blessed to make the right decision, at the right time, and in the Lord’s way to protect the missionaries and prosper the work.

Sense of Humor and Kindness

President Oaks has a delightful sense of humor. For example, at the conclusion of a luncheon attended by all members of the Twelve, one of the Brethren suggested that staying awake during the afternoon would be difficult after enjoying such a delicious meal. President Oaks smiled broadly and replied, “Only if you cannot find a good place to go to sleep.”

He often playfully pokes fun at himself and his baldness. But he also can be a strong defender of those who have little hair on their heads. He frequently declares, “The noble and great always come out on top.”

His warmth and quick wit are endearing, and he is unfailingly considerate and kind. People often comment after being with President Oaks that they loved how he made them feel comfortable because of his sense of humor, the sincerity of his love, and his caring demeanor.

Influence of Righteous Women

With all the accomplishments and accolades associated with his remarkable life, President Oaks is the first to acknowledge the profound influence of three righteous women in his life: Stella Harris Oaks, June Dixon Oaks, and Kristen McMain Oaks.

Dallin Oaks was seven years old when his father, Lloyd E. Oaks, a medical doctor, died of tuberculosis at the age of only 37. He was buried on the 11th anniversary of his marriage to President Oaks’s mother, Stella Harris Oaks. She remained single for the rest of her life and raised their three children.

“I was blessed with an extraordinary mother,” President



Oaks recalls. “She surely was one of the many noble women who have lived in the latter days.”⁴

As a freshman at BYU, President Oaks met June Dixon. They married in 1952 and were blessed to become the parents of six children. “I did not perform at a consistently high level until June came into my life,” President Oaks said. “I owe so much of my accomplishment to her.”⁵ On July 21, 1998, June passed away from cancer.

June and Dallin had talked about the future of their family before she passed away. They agreed that remarrying would be a blessing to him and their family. On August 25, 2000, Elder Oaks married Kristen M. McMain.

Kristen Oaks describes her life with President Oaks with one simple sentence: “We are united in the work of the Lord, and it has showered us with countless blessings.” She creates family gatherings as often as possible because it brings so much joy to the entire family. June is always a part of the conversation.

As President Oaks teaches and testifies about the truths contained in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” he knows firsthand the importance of being a husband and father. He has learned essential lessons about the responsibilities husbands and wives share



Known for making people feel cared for, President Oaks has traveled throughout the world to minister and to share the gospel.

Left: He and his current wife, Kristen, spoke about making family connections at the 2018 RootsTech family history conference.

“to love and care for each other and for their children”—and that “in these sacred responsibilities, [husbands and] fathers and [wives and] mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners.”⁶ Consistently and to the best of his ability, President Oaks has lived his family life following the Lord’s ways.

The Dedication of a Lifetime

On April 6, 2018, President Russell M. Nelson was sustained as President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, with President

Dallin H. Oaks as the First Counselor in the First Presidency and President Henry B. Eying as Second Counselor.

President Oaks comes to his new assignment in the presiding quorum of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with the “tranquil and steady dedication of a lifetime”⁷—a life devoted to the Savior and His restored Church. President Oaks’s personal discipleship, powerful teachings, and the consistency of his righteous example will influence positively people throughout the world and assist them in following the Lord’s ways. ■

NOTES

1. Dallin H. Oaks, *The Lord’s Way* (1991), 7.
2. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Where Will It Lead?” (Brigham Young University devotional, Nov. 9, 2004), speeches.byu.edu.
3. Dallin H. Oaks, “Bible Stories and Personal Protection,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, 39–40.
4. Don L. Searle, “Elder Dallin H. Oaks: ‘It Begins by Following the Other Apostles,’” *Ensign*, June 1984, 14.
5. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Student Body and the President” (Brigham Young University devotional, Sept. 9, 1975), 6, speeches.byu.edu.
6. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, May 2017, 145.
7. See Dallin H. Oaks, “The Dedication of a Lifetime” (Church Educational System fireside for young adults, May 1, 2005), 2, broadcasts.lds.org.