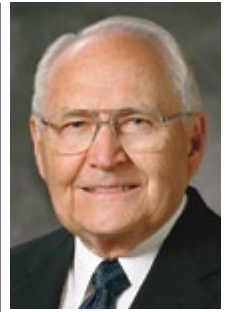


Be certain you are creating a rich environment in which your family can look forward to special times of the year when traditions hold you together as a great eternal family unit.



By Elder L. Tom Perry
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



THE TRADITION OF LIGHT AND TESTIMONY

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is truly a worldwide Church. Nevertheless, it is important to realize that the Church could never have become what it is today without the birth of a great nation, the United States of America. The Lord prepared a new land to attract the peoples of the world who sought liberty and religious freedom. This new land was blessed with strong leaders who felt duty bound to establish a government that allowed individuals to worship according to their own conscience.

The Founding Fathers of the United States believed that religious faith was fundamental to the establishment of strong government. Many people in the world, however, have forgotten the central importance of religious beliefs in the formation of the policies, laws, and rules of government. Many Americans, for example, do not understand that the founders believed the role of religion would be as important in our day as it was in their day. The founders did not consider religion and morality an intellectual exercise—they forcefully declared it an essential ingredient of good government and the happiness of humankind.

This position was set forth by the first U.S. president, George Washington, in his Farewell Address. He said:

“Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. . . . Let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. . . . Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

“It is substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government.”¹

The United States is the promised land foretold in the Book of Mormon—a place where divine guidance directed inspired men to create the conditions necessary for the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It was the birth of the United States of America that



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ushered out the Great Apostasy, when the earth was darkened by the absence of prophets and revealed light. It was no coincidence that the lovely morning of the First Vision occurred just a few decades after the establishment of the United States.

The First Vision precipitated a flood of revealed truth. Knowledge was restored about the nature of the Godhead. A new translated scripture gave a second witness and testament of Jesus Christ. The restoration of the priesthood reendowed mankind with the power and authority to act for and on behalf of God in conducting priesthood ordinances and in reestablishing the Church of Jesus Christ on the earth. We are blessed to be members of the restored Church.

A Plan for Spiritual Security

One of the blessings of the restored Church is living prophets. President Harold B. Lee

(1899–1973) had a beautifully clear understanding of priorities. He taught, “Much of what we do organizationally [in the Church] . . . is scaffolding, as we seek to build the individual, and we must not mistake the scaffolding for the soul.”²

President Lee was not minimizing the role of the Church in the salvation of men, women, and families. Rather, he taught powerfully that the core of the gospel of Jesus Christ is individuals, families, and homes, which the Church functions to support.³ The Church, therefore, is the scaffolding with which we build eternal families.

I belong to a branch of the Wing family tree. Members of the Wing family still own the oldest home built in New England that has stayed in the same family. It is called the Old Fort House. It was the home of Stephen Wing and his family after they arrived in America about 1635.

The nucleus of the house was constructed for protection. Its walls are two feet (0.6 m) thick, made of hewn oak trunks driven into the ground to form the typical construction of a New England garrison. It has two separate walls. The space in between was filled with sandstone for protection against arrows and bullets. The fort was the center of the home. As the Wing family grew, it added onto the sides of the original fort house. But the fort remained their protection, their safe haven.

Perhaps each of us should consider building structures for our spiritual security that are free from the influences of the world—places where we can protect and teach family members how to meet the challenges of a world that is always threatening core gospel values. I prefer to be optimistic, so I continue to hope

for positive change in the world. But I'm also a realist, so I form a contingency plan in case positive changes don't come. My contingency plan for spiritual security must account for all the content—both good and evil—that is being pushed through various media. Where do I look to learn about how to build such a contingency plan for the spiritual security of my family? I look to the Church—the scaffolding with which I build an eternal family.

There are two principal reasons I appreciate President Lee's metaphor for the Church as scaffolding for our eternal families. First, it helps me understand what the Church is. Second, and equally important, I understand what the Church is not.

The Church as scaffolding is perhaps best represented by a statement the Prophet Joseph Smith made about his role as the leader of the Church. He said, "I teach them correct principles, and they govern themselves."⁴ Eternal principles are the scaffolding the Church provides. These eternal principles are embedded in the doctrines of the kingdom of God and are reflected in His eternal plan of happiness. We meet as members of the Church to teach and learn from each other the principles of righteousness and to receive saving ordinances so the scaffolding is steady and stable as we build our eternal families.

Notice that the Church is not meant to do the work of parents; rather, it guides the work of parents. The Church offers an eternal form. As builders of eternal families, we are reassured by promises that if we build according to this eternal form, our efforts can provide the safety and protection we seek for those we love most.

Our challenge is to use the Church as scaffolding to build a family that is as spiritually strong or stronger than the Old Fort House is physically strong. How do we do this?

The Importance of Traditions

I believe family traditions are like the hewn oak trunks driven into the ground to build the Old Fort House. Make the honoring of family traditions—holiday traditions, birthday traditions, Sunday traditions, dinnertime traditions—and the development of new ones a priority throughout your lives. Honor them, write them down, and make certain you follow them. Studies show that the reason young people join gangs is for the tradition and ritual of belonging to something larger than self. That is what a family should be. Be certain you are creating a rich environment in which your family can look forward to special times of the year when traditions hold you together as a great eternal family unit.

Understand that this is neither a simple nor an easy solution. Just as Rome was not built in a day, neither are family traditions. Family traditions can offer basic and lasting support, but there's a lot that must be built around them. Perhaps family traditions work only when they create a role for every member of the family and when there is united effort to build them. This means family members need to spend time together and learn how to work together. When it comes to families, there is no such thing as quality time without a certain quantity of time.

When you consider employment, for example, reflect on how much time a job will demand of you each day. Is it one that will keep you working 14 hours a day and prevent



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you from arriving home until after your children are in bed? I'm not suggesting such employment opportunities are out of bounds, but if you choose them, you must find creative ways to remain connected to your family. The scaffolding of the Church will help remind you of your eternal priorities.

For my career I selected retail business. Our stores were open six days a week from 10:00 in the morning until 10:00 at night. My normal workday was at least 10 hours, sometimes 12 to 15. I had to be very careful to have time for my children, and I believe that seeing the Church as scaffolding continuously reminded me of my eternal priorities.

For example, I involved all of my children in part-time jobs at our stores. My oldest

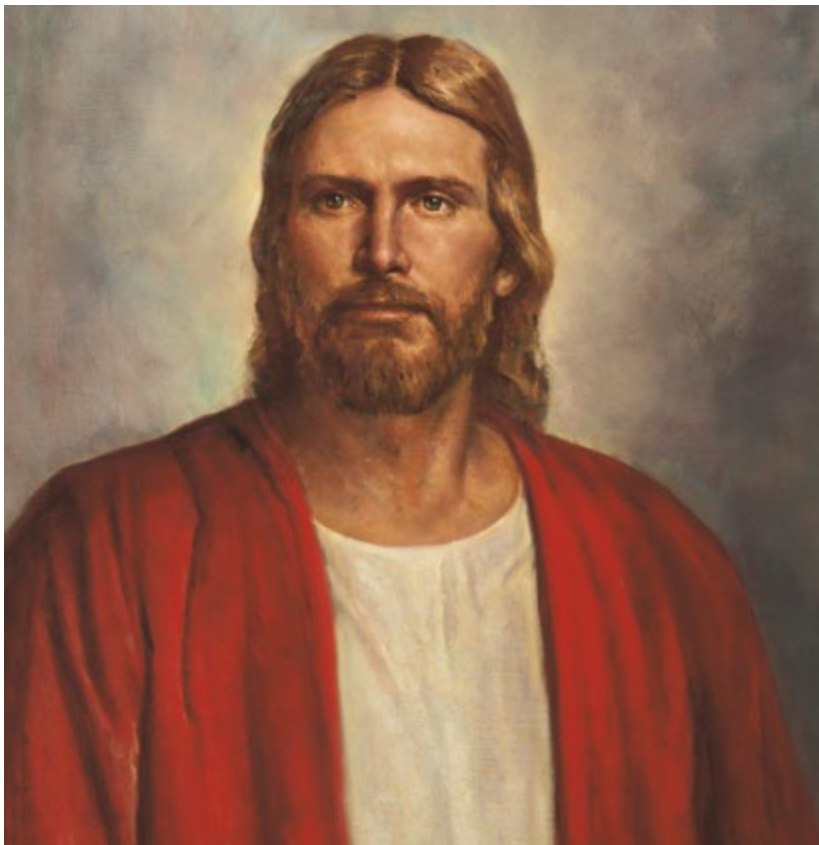
daughter used to come in and update sales figures so that my reporting was always current and I could make year-over-year comparisons. I had my son work in accounts payable during the summer. I taught my youngest daughter how to run a cash register so she could be a part-time cashier. This gave us the opportunity to see each other during the day, have lunch together several days a week, and spend precious one-on-one time together. The best time together was during the daily commute to and from work.

Scaffolding for Our Professional Lives

I also believe the Church can provide scaffolding for our professional lives. As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we represent the Savior and His Church. For us, being as good as someone else from another church is not good enough. President George Albert Smith (1870–1951) taught this lesson when he said:

“Within the last year, I have had the privilege of meeting and conversing on the gospel with some men who live in this community [Salt Lake City], not members of our Church. One man had resided here for twenty years, a man whose life is above reproach, a good citizen, a splendid businessman, one who has kindly feelings towards our people. He told me that he had . . . come to the conclusion that we were just as good as our neighbors who are members of other churches; he could not see any difference in us.

“I want to say to you, my brethren and sisters, that is no compliment to me. If the gospel of Jesus Christ does not make me a better man, then I have not developed as I should, and if our neighbors not in this Church can



live among us from year to year and see no evidence of the benefits that come from keeping the commandments of God in our lives, then there is need for reform in Israel.”⁵

A member of the Church who is worthy of a temple recommend should always stand out in whatever professional circles he or she belongs to. Dare to be different. Never worry about offending others by living up to the standards of the Church. I promise you that living up to temple recommend standards will bless and never hurt you in any situation in which you may find yourself.

Reflecting the Savior’s Light

As I read and watch the news each day, I am shocked at the difficulties we are creating for ourselves. As times and conditions change and become more complex, there seem to be fewer and fewer individuals capable of shouldering the responsibilities of leading positive change. I issue a challenge to you who are leaders and future leaders to recognize that the world is changing rapidly. There is an urgent need for leaders capable and bold enough to take on the immense challenges that face us today.

The moral foundation of a strong Judeo-Christian tradition appears to be eroding in the United States and in other nations. This tradition was based on justice, compassion, and respect for human dignity. It was not based on laws and regulations but on the Light of Christ in every good and decent citizen.

The number of people who subscribe to these beliefs and values is dwindling, but you and I remain true. We have covenanted with the Savior to represent Him. By representing

Jesus Christ and reflecting the Light of Christ in our lives, we can help many of our brothers and sisters remember their Judeo-Christian traditions and heritage.

We must be bold in our declarations and testimony of the divinity of Jesus Christ. We want others to know that we believe He is the central figure in all human history. His life and teachings are the heart of the Bible and the other books we consider to be holy scriptures. The Old Testament sets the stage for Christ’s mortal ministry. The New Testament describes His mortal ministry. The Book of Mormon gives us a second witness of His mortal ministry. He came to earth to declare His gospel as a foundation for all mankind so that all of God’s children could learn about Him and His teachings. He then gave His life in order to be our Savior and Redeemer. Only through Jesus Christ is salvation possible. This is why we believe He is the central figure in all human history. Our eternal destiny is always in His hands. It is a glorious thing to believe in Him and accept Him as our Savior, our Lord, and our Master.

Remember all that the Church has done, is doing, and can do for you and your family. And remember that this is not just any other church; it is the restored Church of Jesus Christ. ■

From a devotional address delivered on January 24, 2012, at Brigham Young University–Idaho. For the full text in English, visit web.byui.edu/devotionalsandspeeches.

NOTES

1. *Washington’s Farewell Address*, ed. Thomas Arkle Clark (1908), 14.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee* (2000), 148.
3. See *Teachings: Harold B. Lee*, 148–49.
4. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 284.
5. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: George Albert Smith* (2011), 7–8.



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