

Helping New Converts

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We are all engaged in the process of retaining new members. It is the ongoing process of conversion—of turning and constantly returning to the Lord.

When I visited southern Brazil some time ago, my husband accompanied me. This was the area where he served his mission. One evening when we arrived at a meeting, we were greeted at the door by a young mother who introduced herself as my interpreter for the meeting. She excitedly turned to my husband and said, “Elder Tanner, you are the one who brought the gospel to my family many years ago. I was just a toddler at the time, but I grew up hearing your name associated with the first baptisms in our family.” Then she told us about each family member’s faithfulness in the Church through the years. What a touching reunion this was!

During the meeting, as my husband looked out at the audience, he saw others dotting the congregation to whom he had taught the gospel and who had remained faithful. When he bore his testimony, my husband expressed his joy to know of their continued faithfulness. He

said he was reminded of the Book of Mormon story in which Alma met his dear friends, the sons of Mosiah, as he was journeying:

“Now these sons of Mosiah were with Alma at the time the angel first appeared unto him; therefore Alma did rejoice exceedingly to see his brethren; and what added more to his joy, *they were still his brethren in the Lord*” (Alma 17:2; emphasis added).

That night in Brazil, my husband likewise met dear friends from the past who “were still his brethren [and sisters] in the Lord.”

This is the desire of every faithful missionary: that new converts stay in the Church and “[wax] strong in the knowledge of the truth” (Alma 17:2). This is the desire of every faithful parent: that their children stay true to the faith. This is also the desire of Church leaders for the members under their care, and it is the heartfelt desire of our Father in Heaven for His children (see Moses 1:39).

Seeking Those Who Stray

I am touched by how frequently the Lord expresses His love for His people, even if they stray—maybe especially when they stray. Think of the parables the Savior gives about lost things: sheep, coins, a prodigal son (see Luke 15). The shepherd goes out after the lost sheep; the woman diligently searches her house for the lost silver; the father runs out to his wayward son while he is “yet a great way off . . . and [falls] on his neck,



STAY STRONG



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and [kisses] him” (Luke 15:20). Likewise, in the parable of the olive tree we glimpse the Lord’s longsuffering love for those who stray (see Jacob 5). Again and again, the Lord of the vineyard laments, “It grieveth me that I should lose this tree” (Jacob 5:7, 11, 13, 32). Throughout the book of Isaiah, the Lord reassures Israel that He cannot forget them: “Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands” (Isaiah 49:16). In the book of Ezekiel the Lord says, “I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken” (Ezekiel 34:16).

When we engage in the work of retention and reactivation, we become agents with the Lord in the loving work of seeking our brothers and sisters who might be as the lost sheep, the lost coin, or the prodigal son.

Entering a New World

The way can also be perilous for those who are new to the Church as they try to adjust to this mighty change in their lives. One new member described this difficult change. She said: “When we as investigators become members of the Church, we are surprised to discover that we have entered into a completely foreign world, a world that has its own traditions, culture, and language. We discover that there is no one person or no one place of reference that we can turn to for guidance in our trip into this new world.”¹



President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) repeatedly taught that both our new members and our straying members need our help. They need a friend, a responsibility, and spiritual nourishing, as taught in the book of Moroni: “After they had been received unto baptism, . . . they were numbered among the people of the church of Christ; and their names were taken, that they might be remembered and nourished by the good word of God, to keep them in the right way” (Moroni 6:4).

During that same trip to Brazil I visited many young women in their homes, desiring to “remember and nourish” them. Some were completely valiant in their testimonies, while others were no longer active in the Church. In each case I asked them if they could recite the Young Women theme. Each one could! Then I asked each one which Young Women value meant the most to her and why. As each girl answered me I felt the Spirit and found at least a spark of faith still alive in those who were no longer attending church. I knew that if someone would remember each of them and love them and nourish that little spark of faith, their light could burn bright again.

Personal Responsibility

To nourish by the good word of God implies that we are attentive to others’ spiritual growth and well-being, just as we nourish our physical bodies. While parents, leaders, and friends should help in this process, new converts, inquiring youths, and struggling members have a personal responsibility to help themselves also. This happens best through personal gospel study.

I remember well the summer I graduated from high school. It was a tumultuous time for me spiritually, a time when I was finding



my way in the gospel, as are many new converts. My antidote for these problems was diligent reading and studying of the Book of Mormon every day, often for extended periods of time. I still remember some of those Spirit-filled times. This was a foundational period for the nourishing and growth of my testimony.

In addition to remembering and nourishing those who are lost or straying, we need to allow them the opportunity to serve. The Savior admonished the Apostle Peter, “When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:32). Church callings give members the opportunity to strengthen others and in that very service grow within themselves as well.

When my children were teenagers and they sometimes did not want to attend Mutual or other meetings, I talked to them about their responsibility. I said that we don’t always go to a meeting for what we can get out of it, but for what we can give. I said often, “You need the Church, and the Church needs you.” New converts and less-active members need to feel needed because they *are* needed.

A Work for All

We are all engaged in the process of retention. It is the ongoing process of conversion—of turning and constantly

returning to the Lord. Alma refers to it as a mighty change (see Alma 5:14). Conversion is the work we are about, whether we labor with investigators, youth, less-active members, or even active members. We should all be engaged in helping in the Lord’s work, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of His children (see Moses 1:39).

My husband wrote in his missionary journal: “Conversion is the greatest miracle. It is even more wonderful than healing the sick or raising the dead. For while a person who is healed will eventually fall sick again and ultimately die, the miracle of conversion can last forever and affect the eternities for the convert as well as for his or her posterity. Whole generations are healed and redeemed from death through the miracle of conversion.”

Let us join the Lord in seeking that which was lost, bringing again that which was driven away, and binding up that which was broken. Then, in that great day of the Lord, we may rejoice as my husband did, finding that those we have loved in the gospel are still our brothers and sisters in the Lord. ■

NOTE

1. Quoted in Gordon B. Hinckley, “Find the Lambs, Feed the Sheep,” *Liahona*, July 1999, 122; *Ensign*, May 1999, 108.