

Supporting Your Bishop

BY JOSEPH STAPLES

My first encounter with a Latter-day Saint bishop occurred before I was a member of the Church. I was 17 years old and was facing the confusion, doubt, and stress that many high school seniors confront. One Saturday morning I was complaining to my best friend about my woes. Even though he had good intentions, he provided me with few answers. But he did offer what turned out to be a profound suggestion. “Sometimes when I don’t know what to do,” he said, “I talk to my bishop.”

“Your bishop? Who is he?” I asked.

“He is the head of my ward,” my friend replied.

I now recognize my next question to be a distinct prompting from the Spirit, but at the time it was the most out-of-character

question I could imagine coming from my 17-year-old mouth. “Do you think he’d meet with me?” I asked.

My friend said he’d call his bishop and call me right back. An appointment was quickly made for later that morning at the bishop’s house.

I didn’t know what to expect. As I pulled up in front of the modest rambler home, I was a bit surprised at its normalcy—bikes in the driveway, nicely mowed lawn. I was even further surprised by the man in the nice, casual shirt

who greeted me at the door. He smiled and said, “Hi, you must be Joe. I’m Bishop Maxwell. Please come in.” As we walked to his small, in-home office, my mind was trying to justify it all. “Shouldn’t the bishop’s home be somehow

different?” I asked myself. “Shouldn’t he dress in a formal robe or something?”

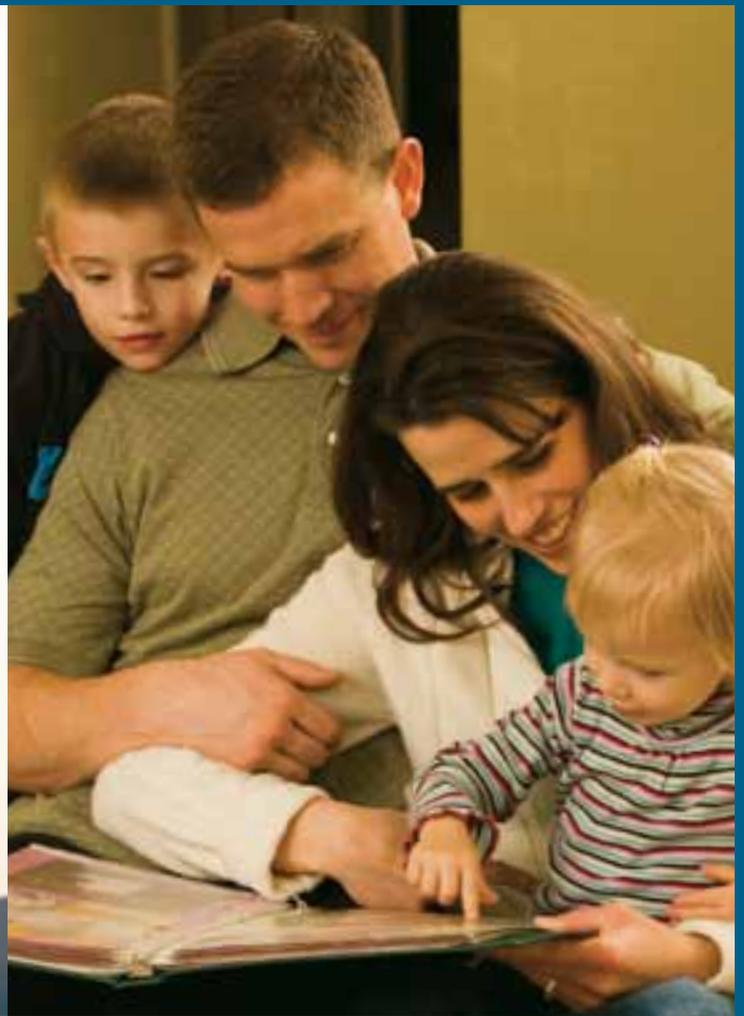
During the next 45 minutes, what I found was a compassionate man, someone who took a sincere interest in my struggles; an inspired man willing to spend some of his precious time on a Saturday morning to help someone, anyone, of his faith or not, make decisions and draw conclusions.

More than 25 years have passed since that meeting. I don’t recall any of the specific advice the bishop imparted that morning, but I still vividly remember the

amazing clarity and lightened burden I felt as I left his home. Not until many years later would I realize that meeting was one of my first experiences in feeling the Spirit.

I joined the Church later that year. My friend Bill, who had referred me to Bishop Maxwell, baptized me. Bishop Maxwell was at the baptism. I later served a mission, married a beautiful young woman in the temple with Bishop Maxwell serving as a witness, and am now raising five wonderful children.

How blessed we are that the Lord sees fit to provide loving, devoted, caring bishops. We can assist them through our support and positive actions.



Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has promised that “if we will sustain and support our bishops, learn to be concerned for their welfare, and pray for their success in all they have to do, it will bless our lives as we are placed under their leadership and have opportunity to follow their inspired direction, as they lead the wards of the Church.”¹

I have come to realize that we can take action to fulfill our responsibility of supporting and sustaining our bishop (or branch president). The following six suggestions provide guidance in accomplishing that objective.

Respect His Family Time

Your bishop will generally drop whatever activity he is involved in to assist one of his ward members in need. He knows his responsibility as a shepherd of the flock and

works hard at fulfilling his sacred stewardship. Being torn in various directions is something he quickly becomes accustomed to.

Your bishop is also a husband, in most cases a father, and often a father with children still at home in need of his guidance and attention. As we look for our bishop’s guidance, we need to be aware and considerate of his time with his family and his responsibility as a provider in his home. While we should never hesitate to call the bishop when we truly need his help, we should still ask ourselves, “Can this wait?” or, “Is there another person, such as a home teacher, who could help me just as well?” Of course, questions of worthiness should be discussed only with our bishop or branch president.

Speaking of bishops and other Church leaders and of the special burdens they bear, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the

As we look for our bishop’s guidance, we need to be considerate of his time with his family and his responsibility as a provider in his home.



When home teachers and visiting teachers properly care for their assigned families, the bishop can focus on those activities that only he can perform.

Twelve Apostles has stated: "I testify of home and family and marriage, the most precious human possessions of our lives. I testify of the need to protect and preserve them while we find time and ways to serve faithfully in the Church."²

The bishop will always be busily engaged in the work of the Lord. That includes devoting time to his eternal calling as husband and father. With considerate planning on our part, we can be a great support in helping the bishop manage a busy and demanding load.

Lighten His Load

Some responsibilities the bishop cannot delegate. These include administering formal Church discipline, conducting tithing settlement, dispensing welfare assistance, and listening to the confessions of repentant ward members. Beyond these responsibilities, however, are many properly delegated things others can do to ease the bishop's burden, such as caring for ward members in need,

planning social activities, and assisting with employment concerns.

When home teachers and visiting teachers properly care for their assigned families, when group leaders and quorum and auxiliary presidents lead in righteousness, the bishop can focus on those activities that only he can perform. If we want to support the bishop and lighten his load, let us be diligent in fulfilling our assigned responsibilities.

Respect the Office

Some new bishops struggle with the transition from being a regular ward member to that of being the ward leader. They realize that in most cases others are equally qualified to serve. Even as they receive a confirmation that the Lord has chosen them for this assignment, accepting the mantle can be as awkward for them as donning the king's armor was for David prior to his battle with Goliath.

The office of bishop is a sacred calling that the Lord has entrusted to a certain

individual in each ward at any given time. We can help him by showing respect for the office. Call him “Bishop” instead of using his first name or a slang or informal title. Show respect in the way you treat him, and you’ll help him better assume the very real mantle the Lord has placed upon him.

Pray for Him

The scriptures teach, “The alms of your prayers have come up into the ears of the Lord” (D&C 88:2). As we pray for our bishop, the Lord does indeed hear us. And when we pray for our bishop during family prayer, we teach our children important principles of faith, obedience, and trust. Many bishops have testified of the strength they have received through the prayers of their ward members.

Accept His Challenges and Follow His Counsel

The bishop is a representative of the Lord Jesus Christ. He may challenge us. He may ask us to serve in positions that might be out of our comfort zone. He may ask us to stretch and give. For our benefit, for his benefit, and as a means of building the Lord’s kingdom here on earth, we should follow the bishop’s counsel and accept and magnify the callings he or his counselors extend to us.

Be Supportive and Nonjudgmental

Bishops, like all of us, are human. They each have different strengths and different leadership styles. As members, we should not compare one bishop with another but know that our bishop is doing his best to follow what the Lord would have him do. We should be complimentary, nonjudgmental, and determined not to engage in criticism or gossip.

A few years ago I was called as a bishop. While serving for several years in that capacity, I experienced some of the greatest joys I have ever known—joys of interviewing enthusiastic eight-year-olds for baptism and confirmation, of working with young men and young women as they prepared to serve missions, and of teaching about the great blessings of the temple to couples preparing for eternal marriage. I thought of Bishop Maxwell on countless occasions during that time. His influence on my life will be eternal.

How blessed we are that the Lord sees fit to provide loving, devoted, caring bishops to shepherd our ward families. Their calling is challenging, and their burden can be heavy at times, yet we have a great opportunity to sustain and assist them through our support and positive actions. ■

NOTES

1. “For a Bishop Must Be Blameless,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1982, 32.
2. “Called to Serve,” *Liabona and Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 38.



LIGHTEN YOUR BISHOP’S BURDEN

“Everyone . . . is accountable to a bishop or a branch president. Tremendous are the burdens which they carry, and I invite every member of the Church to do all that he or she can to

lift the burden under which our bishops and branch presidents labor.

“We must pray for them. They need help as they carry their heavy loads. We can be more supportive and less dependent upon them. We can assist them in every way possible. We can thank them for all that they do for us.”

President Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Shepherds of Israel,” *Liabona and Ensign*, Nov. 2003, 60.



BISHOPS CAN DO ONLY SO MUCH

“In all the world there is nothing quite like the office of bishop in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Except for parents, the bishop has the best opportunity to teach and to cause to be

taught the things that matter most. . . . But be careful not to impose unnecessarily upon his time. Bishops can do only so much. The bishopric must have time to make a living and time for their own families.”

President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “The Bishop and His Counselors,” *Liabona*, July 1999, 71, 73; *Ensign*, May 1999, 57, 58.