



By President M. Russell Ballard
Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Hope in Christ

We long to help all who feel alone or feel they don't belong. Let me mention, in particular, those who are currently single.

Brothers and sisters, at this Easter time we focus on the glorious Resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We remember His loving invitation to “come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”¹

The Savior’s invitation to come unto Him is an invitation to all not

only to come unto Him but also to belong to His Church.

In the verse preceding this loving invitation, Jesus teaches how this is done by seeking to follow Him. He declared, “No man [or woman] knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man [or woman] the Father, save the Son, and he [or she] to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.”²

Jesus wants us to know God is a loving Heavenly Father.

Knowing that we are loved by our Heavenly Father will help us

know who we are and know that we belong to His great eternal family.

The Mayo Clinic recently noted: “Having a sense of belonging is so important. . . . Nearly every aspect of our lives is organized around belonging to something.” This report adds, “We cannot separate the importance of a sense of belonging from our physical and mental health”³—and, I would add, our spiritual health.

On the evening before His suffering in Gethsemane and death on the cross, the Savior met with His disciples for the Last Supper. He said to them, “In the world *ye shall have tribulation*: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”⁴ Before sunset the following day, Jesus Christ had suffered and had “died [on the cross] for our sins.”⁵

I wonder how lonely the faithful women and men who followed Him must have felt in Jerusalem as the sun set and darkness and fear encompassed them.⁶

Like these ancient disciples nearly 2,000 years ago, many of you may also feel lonely from time to time. I have experienced this loneliness since the death of my precious wife, Barbara, over two and a half years ago. I know what it is to be surrounded by family members, friends, and associates but still feel lonely—because the love of my life is no longer here beside me.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted this sense of isolation and loneliness for many. Nevertheless, despite the challenges we face in life, we can, like on that first Easter morning, awake to a new life in Christ, with new and marvelous possibilities and new realities as we turn to the Lord for hope and belonging.



Portugal

I personally feel the pain of those who lack a sense of belonging. As I watch news from around the world, I see many who seem to be experiencing this loneliness. I think that, for many, it is because they may not know that they are loved by Heavenly Father and that we all belong to His eternal family. Believing that God loves us and that we are His children is comforting and assuring.

Because we are the spirit children of God, everyone has a divine origin, nature, and potential. Each of us “is



Norway



Germany

a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents.”⁷ This is our identity! This is who we really are!

Our spiritual identity is enhanced as we understand our many mortal identities, including ethnic, cultural, or national heritage.

This sense of spiritual and cultural identity, love, and belonging can inspire hope and love for Jesus Christ.

I speak of hope in Christ not as wishful thinking. Instead, I speak of hope as an expectation that will be realized. Such hope is essential to overcoming adversity, fostering spiritual resilience and strength, and coming to know that we are loved by our Eternal Father and that we are His children, who belong to His family.

When we have hope in Christ, we come to know that as we need to make and keep sacred covenants, our fondest desires and dreams can be fulfilled through Him.

The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles have counseled together in a spirit of prayer and with a yearning to understand how to help all who feel

alone or feel they don't belong. We long to help all who feel this way. Let me mention, in particular, those who are currently single.

Brothers and sisters, more than half of adults in the Church today are widowed, divorced, or not yet married. Some wonder about their opportunities and place in God's plan and in the Church. We should understand that eternal life is not simply a question of current marital status but of discipleship and being "valiant in the testimony of Jesus."⁸ The hope of all who are single is the same as for all members of the Lord's restored Church—access to the grace of Christ through "obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel."⁹

May I suggest that there are some important principles we need to understand.

First, scriptures and latter-day prophets confirm that everyone who is faithful in keeping gospel covenants will have the opportunity for exaltation. President Russell M. Nelson taught: "In the Lord's own way and time, no blessing will be withheld from His faithful Saints. The Lord will judge and reward each individual according to heartfelt desire as well as deed."¹⁰

*Second, the precise time and manner in which the blessings of exaltation are bestowed have not all been revealed, but they are nonetheless assured.*¹¹ President Dallin H. Oaks explained that some of the circumstances "of mortality will be set right in the Millennium, which is the time for fulfilling all that is incomplete in the great plan of happiness for all of our Father's worthy children."¹²

That doesn't mean that every blessing is deferred until the Millennium; some have already been received, and

others will continue to be received until that day.¹³

Third, waiting upon the Lord implies continued obedience and spiritual progress toward Him. Waiting upon the Lord does not imply biding one's time. You should never feel like you are in a *waiting* room.

Waiting upon the Lord implies action. I have learned over the years that our hope in Christ increases when we serve others. Serving as Jesus served, we naturally increase our hope in Him.

The personal growth one can achieve now while waiting upon the Lord and His promises is an invaluable, sacred element of His plan for each one of us. The contributions one can make now to help build up the Church on earth and to gather Israel are much needed. Marital status has nothing to do with one's capacity to serve. The Lord honors those who serve and wait upon Him in patience and faith.¹⁴

Fourth, God offers eternal life to all of His children. All those who accept the Savior's gracious gift of repentance and live His commandments will receive eternal life, even though they do not attain to all its characteristics and perfections in mortality. Those who repent will experience the Lord's readiness to forgive, as He has assured: "Yea, and as often as my people repent will I forgive them their trespasses against me."¹⁵

In the final analysis, a person's capacity, desires, and opportunities in matters of agency and choice, including qualification for eternal blessings, are matters only the Lord can judge.

*Fifth, our confidence in these assurances is rooted in our faith in Jesus Christ, by whose grace all things pertaining to mortality are set right.*¹⁶ All

promised blessings are made possible through Him, who, by His Atonement, "descended below all things"¹⁷ and has "overcome the world."¹⁸ He "hath sat down on the right hand of God, to claim of the Father his rights of mercy which he hath upon the children of men . . . ; wherefore he advocateth the cause of the children of men."¹⁹ In the end, "the saints shall be filled with his glory, and receive their inheritance"²⁰ as "joint-heirs with Christ."²¹

Our desire is that these principles will help all have increased hope in Christ and feel a sense of belonging.

Never forget that you are a child of God, our Eternal Father, now and forever. He loves you, and the Church wants and needs you. Yes, we need you! We need your voices, talents, skills, goodness, and righteousness.

For many years, we have talked about "young single adults," "single adults," and "adults." Those designations can be administratively helpful *at times* but can inadvertently change how we perceive others.

Is there a way to avoid this human tendency that can separate us from one another?

President Nelson asked that we refer to ourselves as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. That seems to cover all of us, doesn't it?

The gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to unite us. We are ultimately more alike than we are different. As members of God's family, we are truly brothers and sisters. Paul stated, "And [God] hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth."²²

To you stake presidents, bishops, and quorum and sister leaders, I ask you to consider every member of your stake, ward, quorum, or



Priesthood Session | April 3, 2021

By Elder Quentin L. Cook
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

organization as a member who can contribute and serve in callings and participate in many ways.

Every member in our quorums, organizations, wards, and stakes has God-given gifts and talents that can help build up His kingdom now.

Let us call upon our members who are single to serve, lift, and teach. Disregard old notions and ideas that have sometimes unintentionally contributed to their feelings of loneliness and that they do not belong or cannot serve.

I bear my witness on this Easter weekend of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and the eternal hope He gives me and all who believe in His name. And I bear this testimony humbly in His sacred name, even Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Matthew 11:28–30.
2. Matthew 11:27.
3. Jennifer Wickham, “Is Having a Sense of Belonging Important?” *Speaking of Health* (blog), Mayo Clinic Health System, Mar. 8, 2019, mayoclinichealthsystem.org.
4. John 16:33; emphasis added.
5. 1 Corinthians 15:3.
6. See John 20:19.
7. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
8. Doctrine and Covenants 76:79; see also Doctrine and Covenants 121:29.
9. Articles of Faith 1:3.
10. Russell M. Nelson, “Celestial Marriage,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2008, 94.
11. See Mosiah 2:41.
12. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Great Plan of Happiness,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 75.
13. See Hebrews 11:13; 2 Nephi 26:33; Alma 32:21; Ether 12:6; Articles of Faith 1:3.
14. See Isaiah 64:4; Doctrine and Covenants 133:45.
15. Mosiah 26:30.
16. See Alma 7:11–13.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 88:6.
18. John 16:33; see also Doctrine and Covenants 19:3.
19. Moroni 7:27–28.
20. Doctrine and Covenants 88:107.
21. Romans 8:17.
22. Acts 17:26.

Bishops—Shepherds over the Lord’s Flock

The bishop has a paramount role in serving as a shepherd to guide the rising generation to Jesus Christ.

My dear brethren of the priesthood, one of the most memorable lines in a much-loved hymn asks, “Shall the youth of Zion falter?”¹ My heartfelt and resounding declaration in answer to that question is “No!”

To make sure that answer holds true, I testify today that supporting the rising generation in a time of unusual challenges and temptations is an essential responsibility given to parents and bishoprics by Heavenly Father.² Let me illustrate the importance of a bishopric with a personal experience.

When I was a deacon, my family moved to a new home in a different ward. I was beginning junior high school, so I also attended a new school. There was a marvelous group of young men in the deacons quorum. Most of their parents were active members. My mother was completely active; my father was exceptional in every way but was not an active member.

The second counselor in the bishopric,³ Brother Dean Eyre, was a devoted leader. When I was still adjusting to the new ward, a



Madagascar