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The Gospel Culture

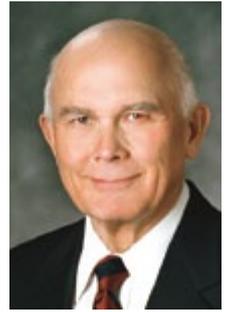
In the famous movie *The African Queen*, two refugees from World War I violence in East Africa are trying to reach the relative safety of Lake Victoria. After surviving many near disasters, their boat, *The African Queen*, is stranded in a marsh. Unable to tell which way the current is flowing and surrounded by high growth, the two refugees become disoriented and discouraged. At the end of their energy and faith, they are about to give up and die.

Then, in a moment of high drama, the camera through which we are viewing their peril rises, and with new perspective we see their true location. Out of sight to them, but just a few meters away, are the long-sought liberating waters of Lake Victoria.

The gospel of Jesus Christ explains our journey in mortality and shows us our destination in eternity. Like the refugees on *The African Queen*, we are fleeing evil and disaster. There are obstacles all around us. We labor hard to reach our goals. Sometimes we see no signs of progress. We can become exhausted and discouraged. We may even lose sight of our destination. But we must not give up. If we could only see above our current circumstances and know our true location on the journey to eternal life, we would realize what great progress we are making.

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This gospel culture comes from the plan of salvation, the commandments of God, and the teachings of the living prophets. To help its members all over the world, the Church teaches us to give up any personal or family traditions or practices that are contrary to this gospel culture.





The gift of the Holy Ghost is the gift God has given to sustain us in our difficult journey through mortality when we walk by faith.

Relying on the Holy Ghost

Fortunately, our Savior has given us a direction finder and guide that will help us even when we cannot see beyond discouraging obstacles. I refer to the gift of the Holy Ghost. But we must be willing to use and rely on this divine gift, and we must keep it in good repair.

President Wilford Woodruff (1807–98), who served as President of the Church during some of its most difficult times, taught this about the importance of the Holy Ghost: “Every man or woman that has ever entered into the church of God and been baptized for the remission of sins [and received the gift of the Holy Ghost] has a right to revelation, a right to the Spirit of God, to assist them in their labors.”¹

President Woodruff explained that “this Spirit reveals, day by day, to every man who has faith, those things which are for his benefit.”² This is the gift God has given to sustain us in our difficult journey through mortality when we walk by faith.

If we are to have this precious guidance, we must keep the commandments. President Woodruff taught: “The Holy Ghost will not dwell in an unholy tabernacle. If you would enjoy the full powers and gifts of your religion, you must be pure. If you are guilty of weakness, follies and sins, you must repent of them; that is, you must thoroughly forsake them.”³

The Lord has commanded us to attend sacrament meeting every week to partake of the sacrament (see D&C 59:9–12). When we do that, repenting of our sins and renewing our promises to serve the Lord and always remember Him and keep His commandments, we have the precious promise that we will “always have his Spirit to be with [us]” (D&C 20:77). This is how we can see beyond the obstacles and discouragements of this life to guide us to our heavenly home.

President Thomas S. Monson has declared: “We are surrounded by immorality, pornography, violence, drugs, and a host of other ills which afflict modern-day society. Ours is the challenge, even the responsibility, not only to keep ourselves ‘unspotted from the world’ (James 1:27) but also to guide our children and others for whom we have responsibility safely through the stormy seas of sin surrounding all of us, that we might one day return to live with our Heavenly Father.”⁴

Truly we need the guidance of the Spirit, and we must be diligent to do those things necessary to have the companionship of that Spirit. Specifically, we must keep the commandments, pray, study the scriptures, and repent weekly as we partake of the sacrament.

A Distinctive Way of Life

As a way to help us keep the commandments of God, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have what we call a gospel culture. It is a distinctive way of life, a set of values and expectations and practices common to all members. This gospel culture comes from the plan of salvation, the commandments of God, and the teachings of the living prophets. It guides us in the way we raise our families and live our individual lives. The principles stated in the proclamation on the family are a beautiful expression of this gospel culture.⁵

To help its members all over the world, the Church teaches us to give up any personal or family traditions or practices that are contrary to the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ and to this gospel culture. In this we heed the warning of the Apostle Paul, who said that we should not let anyone “spoil [us] through philosophy . . . after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

When it comes to giving up false traditions and cultures, we praise our younger people for their flexibility and progress, and we appeal to our older members to put away traditions and cultural or tribal practices that lead them away from the path of growth and progress. We ask all to climb to the higher ground of the gospel culture, to practices and traditions that are rooted in the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

Many African traditions are consistent with the gospel culture and help our members keep the commandments of God. The strong African family culture is superior to

that of many Western countries, where family values are disintegrating. We hope the examples of love and loyalty among members of African families will help us teach others these essential traditions in the gospel culture. Modesty is another African strength. We plead with youth elsewhere to be as modest as most of the young people we see in Africa.

In contrast, some cultural traditions in parts of Africa are negative when measured against gospel culture and values. Several of these concern family relationships—what is done at birth, at marriage, and upon death. For



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example, some African husbands have the false idea that the husband rests while the wife does most of the work at home or that the wife and children are just servants of the husband. This is not pleasing to the Lord because it stands in the way of the kind of family relationships that must prevail in eternity and it inhibits the kind of growth that must occur here on earth if we are to qualify for the blessings of eternity. Study the scriptures and you will see that Adam and Eve, our first parents, the model for all of us, prayed together and worked together (see Moses 5:1, 4, 10–12, 16, 27). That should be our pattern for family

life—respecting each other and working together in love.

Another negative cultural tradition is the practice of *lobola*, or bride price, which seriously interferes with young men and women keeping the commandments of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. When a young returned missionary must purchase his bride from her father by a payment so large that it takes many years to accumulate, he is unable to marry or cannot do so until he is middle-aged. This conflicts with the gospel plan for sexual purity outside marriage, for marriage, and for child rearing. Priesthood leaders should teach parents to discontinue this practice,

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and young people should follow the Lord's pattern of marriage in the holy temple without waiting for the payment of a bride price.

Some other cultural practices or traditions that may conflict with gospel culture are weddings and funerals. I ask you not to make plans in connection with weddings and funerals that would cause you to go deeply into debt. Avoid extensive travel and expensive feasts. Excessive debt will weaken or prevent your ability to pay tithing, to attend the temple, and to send your children on missions. Make plans that will strengthen—not weaken—your future Church activity.

The Importance of Marriage

We live in a wicked world. In saying this, I think first of the willful taking of life, which has occurred so frequently in tribal and national conflicts in Africa and elsewhere. God has also commanded that we not rob people of their property by stealing or fraud. Another great wickedness is the violation of the commandment “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14) and all the related commandments by which God has revealed that the great powers of procreation—given for His purposes—should be employed only within the bonds of marriage. It is sinful to engage in sexual relations outside of marriage.

We live in a day when marriage is looked on as an option, not a necessity. For example, unwed mothers give birth to 40 percent of all children now being born in the United States. Many people live together without marriage. The children born from those relationships do not have the security of parents committed to one another by the marriage God ordained for our first parents in the Garden of Eden.⁶

Marriage is essential, but in Africa and in other nations, we must ask, what kind of

marriage? There are formal marriages authorized by law, and there are various customary or tribal marriages that can be entered into and discontinued without much formality. The Lord's standard—formalized in the requirements we have for sealing a marriage in the temple—is a marriage that is as permanent as the laws of man can make it.

I reaffirm the counsel Church leaders have given that husbands and wives should not separate for long periods, such as for foreign or other distant employment. In too many cases, such separations are followed by serious sin. Separations lead to the breaking of eternal covenants, which causes heartache and loss of blessings. In modern revelation the Lord has commanded, “Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else” (D&C 42:22). When we follow the commandments of the Lord and the counsel of His leaders regarding marriage, we can call on Him to bless us in all other things.

The Blessings of Tithing

Tithing is a commandment with a promise. The words of Malachi, reaffirmed by the Savior, promise those who bring their tithes into the storehouse that the Lord will “open . . . the windows of heaven, and pour [them] out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.” The promised blessings are temporal and spiritual. For tithe payers, the Lord promises that He will “rebuke the devourer” and that “all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land” (Malachi 3:10–12; see also 3 Nephi 24:10–12).

I believe these promises apply to the nations in which we reside. When the people of God withheld their tithes and offerings, God condemned the “whole nation” (Malachi 3:9). Similarly, I believe that when many citizens of a



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nation are faithful in the payment of tithes, they summon the blessings of heaven upon their entire nation. The Bible teaches that “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (Galatians 5:9; see also Matthew 13:33) and that “righteousness exalteth a nation” (Proverbs 14:34). This much-needed blessing can be called down by faithfulness in paying tithing.

The payment of tithing also brings the individual tithing payer unique spiritual as well as temporal blessings. During World War II my widowed mother supported her three young children on a meager schoolteacher’s salary. When I became conscious that we went without some desirable things because we didn’t have enough money, I asked my mother why she paid so much of her salary as tithing. I have never forgotten her explanation: “Dallin, there might be some people who can get along without paying tithing, but we can’t because we are poor. The Lord has chosen to take your father and leave me to raise you children. I cannot do that without the blessings of the Lord, and I obtain those blessings by paying an honest tithing. When I pay my tithing, I have the Lord’s promise that He will bless us, and we must have those blessings if we are to get along.”

As a lifelong recipient of those blessings, I testify to the goodness of our God and His bounteous blessings to His tithing children.

Building Up the Church

As we seek to establish the Church in Africa and other nations, we must have third- and fourth-generation faithful Latter-day Saint families in our leadership and membership. Faithful Latter-day Saints who move to another country weaken the Church in their homeland. Of course the Church does not *forbid* its members from moving from one place to another to better themselves, but it has been many years since

the Church has *encouraged* such emigration.

Long ago, Latter-day Saints were encouraged to gather to Zion in America to establish the Church and build temples there. Now that the Church is strong in its center stakes, we counsel members to remain, to build up the Church in their homelands. We encourage this by building temples all over the world.

Following the Lord’s way is not easy. The Lord has warned us again and again, directly and through His servants, that the world will hate us for doing things differently—the Lord’s way (see John 15:19).

The good news is that when we do the Lord’s work in the Lord’s way, we are assured of His blessings to help us. “I will go before your face,” He has said. “I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up” (D&C 84:88).

Loving One Another

How grateful we are for the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. It tells us who we are. When we understand our relationship to God, we also understand our relationship to one another. This includes our relationship to our spouse and our children—eternal relationships if we keep the commandments and make and keep sacred temple covenants.

All men and women on this earth are the offspring of God, spirit brothers and sisters, whatever their color or citizenship. No wonder God’s Only Begotten Son commanded us to love one another. What a different world it would be if brotherly and sisterly love and unselfish assistance could cross over all boundaries of tribe, nation, creed, and color. Such love would not erase all differences of opinion and action, but it would guide each of us to focus our efforts on cooperative actions with

our neighbors rather than on hatred or oppression of them.

I affirm the great truth that our Heavenly Father loves all His children. This is an immensely powerful idea that children can begin to understand through the love and sacrifice of their earthly parents. Love is the most powerful force in the world. I pray that every parent is providing the kind of loving example that encourages the rising generation to understand the love of God toward them and the great desire of our Heavenly Father that all of His children on earth do what is necessary to qualify for the choicest blessings of eternity.

We have His gospel, and we need to keep the commandments to enjoy His choicest blessings. I bear testimony of this and ask the blessings of our Heavenly Father upon each of you. ■

NOTES

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Wilford Woodruff* (2004), 49.
2. *Teachings: Wilford Woodruff*, 51.
3. *Teachings: Wilford Woodruff*, 54.
4. Thomas S. Monson, "Heavenly Homes, Forever Families," *Liahona*, June 2006, 67–68; *Ensign*, June 2006, 99–100.
5. See "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.
6. See *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.



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