

Elder D. Todd Christofferson

PREPARED TO SERVE THE LORD



BY ELDER QUENTIN L. COOK

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

As a teenager living in Somerset, New Jersey, Todd Christofferson participated in the cast of the Hill Cumorah Pageant near Palmyra, New York, for two summers. During the production his first year, young Todd remembered the words of a former bishop. He had encouraged the youth of the ward to never give up striving with the Lord until they had “burned into [their] hearts a testimony of the gospel.”

Todd had taken the words of his priesthood leader seriously and had prayed about his testimony from time to time. But there in Palmyra, the cradle of the Restoration, he determined this was the time and place he was going to get a sure confirmation.

“One night after the performance, I went to the Sacred Grove alone,” he remembers. “It was a beautiful summer evening. I took off my shoes, went in, and began to pray. I prayed very diligently for an hour, maybe more—and nothing happened.”

After some time, he gave up and left. Disappointment consumed him. What had he done wrong? Why hadn’t Heavenly Father answered his prayer?

In what seemed like no time at all, the two-week stretch of pageant performances ended, and Todd returned to New Jersey. About a month later, as he was reading the Book of Mormon at home in his bedroom, he received his answer.

“Without my asking for it, the witness came,” he recalls. “It came without words, but I received a very powerful spiritual confirmation—





the kind that leaves no doubt—about the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith.

“Looking back on that experience, I realize that we can’t dictate to God when, where, or how He will speak to us. We just have to be open to receive what He disposes, when He disposes it. It comes according to *His* will.

“I’m glad that Heavenly Father didn’t respond to me that night in Palmyra. I might have thought that you have to be in a special place to get an answer to prayer or to gain a testimony. But you don’t have to make a pilgrimage to Palmyra to know that Joseph Smith was a prophet or that the Book of Mormon is true. You don’t have to go to Jerusalem to know that Jesus is the Christ. If Heavenly Father found me in Somerset, New Jersey, He can answer the prayers of anybody, anywhere in the world. He knows us intimately, and He can answer us whatever our place or circumstances.”

With that testimony “burned” into his heart, Todd Christofferson was preparing for a life of service in the Lord’s kingdom.

Idyllic Childhood

David Todd Christofferson was born to Paul Vickery and Jeanne Swenson Christofferson on January 24, 1945, in American Fork, Utah. His father was in China, serving in the U.S. military near the end of World War II, so

Todd and his mother lived with Sister Christofferson’s parents, Helge and Adena Swenson, for approximately 18 months. This was the start of a close relationship between Todd and his grandparents, one that would be extremely influential throughout his life.

Todd and his four younger brothers were raised in Pleasant Grove and Lindon, Utah. They enjoyed what he describes as an “idyllic” and “wholesome” childhood, one in which the boys enjoyed unstructured time to play, invent, and learn.

“We had a very secure, happy home life,” Elder Christofferson remembers. “Father and Mother taught us through their examples and showed us how to live according to the pattern of the gospel.”

His parents, in turn, remember Todd as an obedient, happy son. “Todd was a good boy and always knew what kind of life he wanted to live,” his father says. “He was a great influence on his brothers.”

His parents also recall that he was eager to help wherever he saw a need. When Todd was 13 years old, his mother underwent significant surgery as part of cancer treatment. Elder Christofferson’s father, who was with her at the hospital, learned that Todd had gathered his brothers to pray for their mother.

The surgery was successful, but it limited Sister Christofferson’s ability to complete

Opposite page: Todd Christofferson as a teenager at the Hill Cumorah Pageant in Palmyra, New York, in 1962. Above, left to right: Todd with his parents and brother Greg (right) in 1948; the Christofferson brothers—Tim, Todd, Greg, Tom, and Wade—with their grandfather Helge Swenson, in 1964; Todd at approximately six years old. Elder Christofferson remembers his childhood as “wholesome” and “idyllic.”



Above, left to right: Elder Christofferson (left) with missionary companion Glen Willardson, in Salta, Argentina, 1965; Elder Christofferson at a baptism, 1966. Opposite page, left to right: Elder and Sister Christofferson on their wedding day in 1968, with their parents; Elder Christofferson with children Todd and Brynn, acting out the Nativity in 1977; the Christofferson family celebrating the United States' bicentennial in 1976.



some routine household tasks. Todd knew how much his mother loved homemade bread—and how difficult it would be for her to continue to make it. He asked his grandmother to teach him how to bake bread, and he made it regularly for his family until he left for college several years later.

New Home, New Experiences

When Todd was about 15 years old, his father, a veterinarian, took a new job in New Brunswick, New Jersey. At the time of the family's move, Lindon, Utah, had very few people, so the transition to the more populated setting of New Jersey was a dramatic shift for the entire Christofferson family. Still, the next several years—full of new places, people, and opportunities—would be some of the most formative of Todd's life.

The only Church member in his high school class, Todd enjoyed friendships and associations with people from a variety of cultural and religious backgrounds, something that would continue throughout his life. Todd discovered that many of his friends felt their beliefs as fervently as he felt his own, which caused him to think deeply and pray fervently about what he knew. "I began to see that the Church wasn't just nice," he says. "It was life-and-death important. I began to appreciate what I had."

Greg Christofferson, one of Elder Christofferson's brothers, who shared a room with him for over 16 years, remembers, "Todd was always spiritually inclined and exemplary

in his conduct." Greg notes that a few years after his brother graduated from high school, one of Todd's outstanding classmates had been praying with his wife about how to raise their young children. When Latter-day Saint missionaries came to their door, the man recalled how good and honorable Todd, one of the only Latter-day Saints he knew, had been. Because of that memory, the man invited the missionaries in, and he and his family joined the Church.

Young Todd's growing testimony—solidified by his experience after the Hill Cumorah Pageant—was further bolstered by a strong, supportive peer group of Latter-day Saint youth in the New Brunswick Ward in the New Jersey Stake, a group that Elder Christofferson says "lived to be together on Wednesdays and Sundays."

"The Church was the center of our family life," Elder Christofferson remembers. "It drew us close as a family, and it drew us closer to others in the ward."

Mission to Argentina

After graduating from Franklin High School in Somerset, Elder Christofferson attended Brigham Young University for a year and then left in September 1964 to serve in the Argentina North Mission, an event he considers seminal. His love for the people and cultures of Latin America has remained a significant part of his life.

During his mission, Elder Christofferson learned from "two exceptional mission presidents," President Ronald V. Stone and President Richard G. Scott, now a fellow

member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Elder Christofferson recalls with great fondness and appreciation the contribution of both presidents and their wives.

Elder Scott remembers Elder Christofferson as “an exceptionally outstanding missionary whose devotion and capacities were evidence that he would have a life of unusual significance.” Elder Scott notes that this young elder was particularly disciplined, obedient, and hardworking, and that he demonstrated “a gentleness of spirit that blessed each of his companions and endeared him to his investigators and converts.”

Elder Scott recalls a particular incident when he saw Elder Christofferson have a bicycle accident in which he damaged his suit and injured his hands. But he was undaunted. Elder Scott says, “He brushed himself off, climbed onto the bicycle, and headed off for an appointment with his companion.”

University and Marriage

After returning from Argentina in December 1966, Elder Christofferson again enrolled at BYU, where he studied English and became involved in student government and intramural athletics.

Toward the end of the first semester after his mission, a pretty young woman he saw on campus caught his attention. Although he didn’t meet her then, he did remember

her face and looked her up when the campus yearbook was published a few months later.

The student was Kathy Jacob, an attractive, gregarious young woman who had lived in both California and Utah. The following fall, when he was back in school, Todd arranged through a mutual friend to take Kathy on a date.

Over the next several months, they found they were compatible. Their love grew and matured, and the following spring, on May 28, 1968, they were married in the Salt Lake Temple.

“I knew Kathy was good and wonderful when we were first married,” Elder Christofferson says. “I just didn’t know how deep her character and qualities and wisdom and goodness really were. I’ve been happily surprised as time has gone by how much better she is than I realized even then.”

The Christoffersons’ daughter, Brynn Nufer, also attests to her mother’s goodness. She says, “Everywhere we have lived, people have just loved her. She’s super creative. She’s real. And she’s fun, fun, fun!”

A Distinguished Law Career

Both Elder and Sister Christofferson graduated from BYU in 1969. Elder Christofferson went on to pursue a law degree





at Duke University. When he completed his schooling in 1972, he was hired as a law clerk to federal judge John J. Sirica, the judge who would later preside at the Watergate trials. *Time* magazine named Judge Sirica Man of the Year and called the Watergate affair “the worst political scandal in U.S. history.”¹ The scandal and its legal trials pervaded the U.S. news in 1973 and 1974.

Elder Christofferson had planned to clerk for one year and then work for a prominent Washington, D.C., law firm, from which he had received an employment offer. Elder Ralph W. Hardy, now an Area Seventy, has spent his career as a member of that firm and remembers that in those difficult Watergate days, Judge Sirica called the firm’s managing partner and said, “I can’t let Todd go. He is too valuable. He is the only person I can talk to.” As a result, Todd assisted Judge Sirica throughout the Watergate proceedings.

Elder Hardy recalls that much later, in 1992, a non-LDS attorney came into his office and exclaimed, “I’ve just come from the most inspiring funeral mass I have ever attended.” It was for Judge Sirica, whose family had requested that Elder Christofferson speak at the funeral. Elder Christofferson had taught the plan of salvation.

Following his clerkship, Elder Christofferson fulfilled an active duty requirement with the U.S. Army, followed by eight years in the inactive reserves. He completed his military commitment as a reserve captain.

Over the next 30 years Elder Christofferson had a distinguished legal career. He worked first at the law firm of Dow Lohnes PLLC, then as in-house counsel for a health-care system and several banking entities. He was associate general counsel of NationsBank Corp. (now Bank of America) at the time of his call to the Seventy. His work took the family to Washington, D.C.; Nashville, Tennessee;

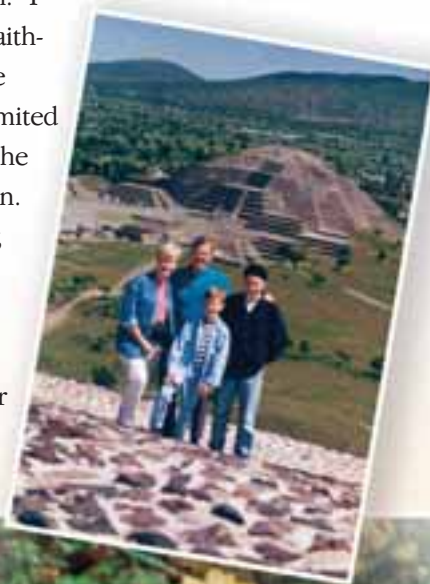
Herndon, Virginia; and Charlotte, North Carolina. What Elder Christofferson says he most enjoyed about the years he and his family spent living in the eastern United States was “association with good people of all walks of life and all faiths.” In addition to his Church service—which included callings as stake mission president, bishop, stake president, and regional representative—he participated in several interfaith and community service groups.

Family Memories

The Christoffersons have five children: Todd, Brynn, Peter, Ryan, and Michael. They also have eight grandchildren. The Christofferson children describe their upbringing as loving, caring, and centered on gospel principles. They remember a good balance of family fun and individual training.

Peter recalls serving as his father’s companion as a new home teacher during a particularly busy period in his father’s life. Elder Christofferson was working as corporate counsel and serving as stake president, but he still made time for teaching his children. “I was inspired by my father’s faithfulness in being a great home teacher, despite his having limited time,” Peter recalls. “One of the sisters we visited was a shut-in. Father cared for her tenderly, making sure that she always had the sacrament and that her needs were met.”

Brynn also remembers her father as being very thoughtful. Just two days after she





left home to attend Brigham Young University, she received flowers from him at her dormitory. The accompanying note said simply, “Have a great semester.”

“While Dad had high expectations of us, he was never preachy. He was very loving and low-key,” she says. “He was very happy, and he wanted us to be happy.”

Service in the Seventy

On April 3, 1993, Elder Christofferson was sustained as a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy. His initial assignment took his family to Mexico City, where he served for a time as Mexico South Area President.

On August 15, 1998, Elder Christofferson was called as a member of the Presidency of the Seventy, where he served until his call to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. His responsibilities included serving as Executive Director of the Family and Church History Department and then overseeing the North America Southeast Area. Most recently he has had responsibility for the North America Northwest and North America West Areas. His assignments have given him opportunities to meet with Latter-day Saints all over the world.

I am grateful for my association with Elder Christofferson in the Seventy and in the Presidency of the Seventy. He is very capable, is attuned to the promptings of the Spirit, and is loved and admired by the members of

the Seventy. He is known for his great sense of humor, and it is a joy to work with him.

A Call to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Elder Christofferson says that when he received his new calling from President Thomas S. Monson, it initially “seemed impossible.”

“The Apostles are people I’ve admired and followed and listened to all of my life, and it seems impossible for me to be one of them,” he says. “The responsibility seems overwhelming as I contemplate it. But I have had wonderful tutors as I have worked with members of the Seventy and the Quorum of the Twelve over the last 15 years.”

He is also quick to emphasize on whom we all rely—the same Source of his answers when he was a teenager looking to solidify his testimony. “I am a great believer in the power of prayer,” he says. “We can always turn to prayer. Sometimes it’s all we have left, but it’s always sufficient for the need.

“In every crisis, in every transition, in every need I’ve ever had, Heavenly Father has been accessible through prayer. I have trusted in Him and have not been disappointed. Surely His promises are still in place. I know that He will give me the help I need here too.” ■

NOTE

1. “Judge John J. Sirica: Standing Firm for the Primacy of Law,” *Time*, Jan. 7, 1974; available at www.time.com/time/magazine.

Opposite page, left to right: Elder and Sister Christofferson with U.S. federal judge John J. Sirica, for whom Elder Christofferson served as a law clerk during the Watergate trials; the Christoffersons with their children and grandchildren; Elder and Sister Christofferson and their sons Ryan and Michael in Mexico, in 1994. Above, left to right: As one of the Presidents of the Seventy, 1998; Elder and Sister Christofferson with Elder Yoshihiko Kikuchi of the Seventy and his wife, Toshiko, at the site where Japan was dedicated for the preaching of the gospel.