

Elder Neil L. Andersen: *Man of Faith*

BY ELDER D. TODD CHRISTOFFERSON

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

One February evening in 1968, Neil Andersen found himself the center of attention. He had been selected as a high school junior to represent Idaho in the Student Burgesses, a gathering of students from 37 countries and each of the 50 states in the United States. Students came together in Williamsburg, Virginia, to discuss challenges facing democracy.

This was the first time 16-year-old Neil, raised on a small farm in Pocatello, Idaho, had ever flown on an airplane, traveled so far from home, or been among so many bright and sophisticated young people.

As evening discussions turned to subjects around the world, Neil's membership in the Church became evident. Some of the delegates began to challenge his beliefs. Young Neil had never before been asked such pointed questions regarding his faith.

"I remember praying in my mind that I would say the words that needed to be spoken," he recalls. "What followed was a little miracle for me. I told them more than I knew. I felt the power of the Lord as He guided me through sensitive explanations and the sharing of my deep convictions. I could feel the Spirit of the Lord as I spoke. At the conclusion they expressed their appreciation and quietly acknowledged their respect for what I believed.

"I learned that there is a power and influence in this sacred work beyond ourselves and that it is worth defending. I understood that as we are true and faithful, 'ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh [us] a reason of the hope that is in [us]' (1 Peter 3:15), the Lord will bless us beyond our own abilities."

This is how Elder Neil L. Andersen has lived his life—acting in faith.

A Foundation of Faith

Neil Linden Andersen was born on August 9, 1951, the third of five children, to Lyle and Kathryn Andersen. Neil's father was a student at





Utah State University studying agricultural husbandry. When Neil was three, the family moved to Colorado.

Neil's parents taught their family through their own faith and sacrifice. They lived 90 miles (145 km) from the meetinghouse. Making the journey to Church meetings was something they just did every Sunday. "We wanted to show our children how important the Church is," his mother, Kathryn, explains.

When Neil was five, his family moved to a dairy farm in Pocatello, Idaho. Neil raised rabbits, rode horses, and played in the fields with his siblings. When Neil was about seven years old, a rabbit he especially liked escaped from its cage. He relates:

"I looked all over our little farm, but I could not find it anywhere. I remember walking back behind an old barn and praying that I could find the rabbit.

"Immediately after the prayer, an image came into my mind of a spot beneath some boards. And sure enough, I went to that spot and found my rabbit. This experience and many others like it taught me that the Lord responds to the small and simple prayers of all of us."

Life on his parents' farm instilled the principle of hard work in Neil. "I milked a lot of cows and moved a lot of irrigation pipe," he says. "I can remember that on Christmas morning before we opened our presents, we had cows to milk. Looking back, I realize how valuable it was to

learn that part of life is just hard work."

As a young man Neil also worked hard at sports. In high school he lettered in cross-country running. However, he focused most of his energies on excelling in other ways. His mother recalls, "While at Highland High School, he attended Boys State in Boise, Idaho, and was elected governor by all of the other delegates. He was president of the Idaho Association of Student Councils, which included all the high school student body officers throughout Idaho."

As a freshman at Brigham Young University in 1969, Neil Andersen was a diligent student. However, his sister Sheri notes, "as driven as he was by education, he was always planning to go on a mission. His only question was if he was really prepared to serve. I was so impressed that faith was a choice to him."

Elder Andersen also remembers putting the question to the Lord. As he recalled recently in general conference, the feeling came, "You don't know everything, but you know enough."¹ Armed with that assurance, Neil Andersen accepted a mission call and served faithfully in France.

After his mission Neil continued to excel at BYU. He was named an Edwin S. Hinckley Scholar and elected student body vice president.

It was also at BYU that he met the person who would have the greatest influence on his life: Kathy Sue Williams. He and Kathy were married in the Salt Lake Temple on March 20, 1975, just before he graduated. Marriage was followed by two years at Harvard University, where he earned

Opposite page, from left to right: Neil L. Andersen today and as a teenager in high school in Pocatello, Idaho. Above, from left to right: Neil (center) with his parents, Kathryn and Lyle, and siblings Lauri, Sheri, and Alan, 1962; Neil as a young boy on the farm in Idaho. Below: Neil as a missionary in France, 1970-72.





Above: Neil and Kathy on their wedding day, 1975, at the Salt Lake Temple. Right: Neil and Kathy with their children, Brandt, Derek, Camey (Hadlock) in back, and Kristen (Ebert), in Tampa, Florida, 1988. Opposite page: The Andersen family in France while Elder Andersen served as mission president, around 1990.

a master's degree in business administration in 1977.

A Focus on Family

Neil and Kathy had their first child while attending Harvard, toward the end of their first year of marriage. Three more children followed.

With the arrival of children, Kathy postponed her studies but never gave up on finishing her degree. Elder Andersen expresses his admiration: "When we were in Brazil [where Elder Andersen served in the Area Presidency] and the children were

no longer living with us, she opened her books, learned Portuguese, and finished her degree—18 credit hours in Portuguese. That's the kind of tenacity that she has."

Following graduate school, the Andersens moved to Tampa, Florida, where they intended to settle for life, as this was where Kathy had been reared and where her family still lived. Neil engaged in several successful business ventures, including real estate development, health care, and advertising. The Lord, however, had other plans for him.

In 1989, while serving in a stake presidency, Neil was called as the mission president in Bordeaux, France. After returning to Florida in 1992, he was called within a month to be president of the Tampa Florida Stake. The following year, a new calling came: this time to the First Quorum of the Seventy. In 2005, he was called to the Presidency of the Seventy. Then, in April 2009, he was called to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Despite the pressures of his work and

his Church callings through those many years, his devotion to his family never wavered.

The Andersens' oldest daughter, Camey Hadlock, says, "Daddy [an endearing term still used by his sons and daughters] always made time for the children. For example, he took each one individually to breakfast with him once a month. He let us pick the place for breakfast and the topics we would talk about. We looked so forward to having his undivided attention."

Derek Andersen remembers his dad making time to play: "Growing up, we loved playing basketball as a family. He'd come home from work, and we'd team up against my older brother and play basketball together."



Daughter Kristen Ebert recalls that even though her father was extremely busy, “he always had time to listen and to give sound advice.”

The Andersens were so faithful in having family scripture study and singing a hymn each night that the children would do it alone if their parents returned home late.

For family home evening, the Andersens would often study the conference talks in the *Ensign*. “It was clear that when the prophet spoke, we listened,” Derek says.

Sister Andersen says, “Neil is a man with deep faith and love for the Savior. The loving kindness he has always shown to me and our children has brought immeasurable strength to our family and filled our lives with happiness and peace.”

Judging by the way her husband treats her, one can see that Kathy is the heart of the home. She explains, “Neil recognizes and expresses an abundance of gratitude for the little things that I do each day—things that many people would not even notice or would regard as insignificant, such as cleaning the house, preparing dinner, or washing the clothes.”

Kristen says, “I’ve always appreciated my father’s example of treating my mother with kindness and respect. He opens doors for her, helps her be seated, volunteers to do the dishes, and so forth.”

Elder Andersen says, “Kathy is absolute and uncompromising in her loyalty to the Lord and to me and the family. She does so much to put me and the children first. It is impossible not to love her completely and want to do things for her.

“Once I married her,” he adds, “the standards in my life went way up—being totally consistent in prayer and scripture study, keeping the commandments with precision. Her influence upon me and our children is phenomenal. She has a pure and disciplined faith.”

Elder Andersen credits his wife with being a strong support to the children through challenging circumstances. Including their mission, they spent 10 of the past 20 years outside the United States, moving a total of eight times. “You can see the challenges our children faced moving

nearly every year: new friends and in most cases a new country. Kathy was the strength that held them together and kept them realizing that this would be a positive experience for them.”

The children too were resilient. “We appreciate the children’s sacrifices during those years. The Lord has rewarded them richly with choice companions and wonderful children of their own,” Elder Andersen says.

Trusting the Lord

When President Thomas S. Monson, then a counselor in the First Presidency, called Neil Andersen to serve as mission president, accepting that call required financial sacrifice. Neil owned a prosperous and growing advertising agency. “It’s not a business that is easily left to others,” Elder Andersen explains. “We accepted the call not knowing how we would make the transition work.”

Sister Andersen adds, “I have always had confidence in his faith. He has consistently reassured us: ‘If we put the Lord first, He will open the way, and miracles will follow.’”

Within weeks an offer to buy the business came forward unsolicited. “It was clearly the Lord’s hand at work in a miraculous way,” Elder Andersen says.

The principle of the Lord’s work being a work of miracles was taught constantly to the missionaries in France. Kurt Christensen, who served as a missionary under President Andersen, explains, “He always raised our vision of the blessings the Lord desired for France. He taught about pure faith and obedience with exactness, and the Lord poured out His miracles upon us.”

Wherever their assignments have taken the Andersens—western Europe, Brazil, Mexico, and elsewhere—they have loved the devoted members of the Church and have worked diligently to learn the language of the countries.





Once, when Kathy commented on the countless hours Neil devoted to learning languages, he expressed that he had been given a spiritual gift and that the Lord expected him to labor diligently to realize that gift. Elder Andersen now speaks French, Portuguese, and Spanish.

Following the Brethren

“For 16 years the members of the First Presidency and the Twelve have been my examples and teachers,” Elder Andersen explained as he spoke in general conference after his call to the Twelve. “I have experienced their love and sure witness of our Heavenly Father and His Son. I have watched them untiringly seek first to build up the kingdom of God. I have seen the power of God rest upon them and magnify and sustain them. I have witnessed the fulfillment of their prophetic voice.”²

While Elder Andersen served as Executive Director of the Church Audiovisual Department, he had almost weekly meetings with President James E. Faust (1920–2007). “One time I went to President Faust with a piercing problem I didn’t know how to solve,” Elder Andersen recalls. “He said to me, ‘Neil, have you prayed about it? Have you prayed all night like Enos did?’ And then he sat back in his chair and said, ‘I’ve prayed all night many times to receive the answer to difficult challenges. That is how you will get your answer as well.’ He was right.”

It was at this time that Elder Andersen oversaw the development of the movie *The Testaments of One Fold and One Shepherd*; the initial launch of Mormon.org, the Church’s missionary Web site; and the installation of the audiovisual systems in the Conference Center in Salt Lake City.

Through these experiences Elder Andersen has recognized the guidance of the First Presidency and the Twelve. “The Brethren teach you about spiritual power. They are not just teaching you facts; they are teaching how to understand and listen to the Lord. You learn to be a servant of the Lord.”

Serving the One

Elder Andersen acknowledges, “President Monson has been a wonderful teacher to me and many others, as he has taught us to reach out to others as the Savior would. He has constantly emphasized that there is no greater joy than knowing you have been an instrument in the Lord’s hand to answer an honest prayer.”

These principles have taken root in Elder Andersen.

The mother of a young man whom Elder Andersen had once met briefly recalls that at one point her son “was on the verge of emotional and physical collapse” when he saw Elder and Sister Andersen sitting at a table in a cafeteria. “My son later told us, ‘I would not have approached any other person, but when I saw Elder Andersen, I knew he loved me, and I immediately got up from my chair and approached him.’”

Despite the terrible change in the young man’s appearance caused by his current crisis, Elder Andersen recognized him and called him by name. Elder and Sister Andersen took the young man home, fed him, and talked

MILESTONES IN CHURCH SERVICE

- 1970–72: Missionary, France
- 1984–89: Counselor, Tampa Florida Stake presidency
- 1989–92: President, France Bordeaux Mission
- 1992–93: President, Tampa Florida Stake
- 1993: Called to the First Quorum of the Seventy
- 1994–97: Counselor, Europe West Area Presidency
- 1998–2001: Executive Director, Church Audiovisual Department
- 2002–05: President, Brazil South Area Presidency
- 2005–09: Presidency of the Seventy
- 2008–09: Senior President, Presidency of the Seventy
- April 2009: Called to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



at length with him. Then, though it was midnight, Elder Andersen drove several hours to take the young man home.

“Elder Andersen’s influence didn’t end there,” explains the mother. “Now, years later, he continues to see our son, to be interested in his life. He saved our son.”

Once, when Elder Andersen was visiting in a hospital, he noticed a 26-year-old patient named Lora McPherson, who was recovering from surgery related to cancer. Her mother, Nancy, relates:

“[Elder Andersen] gave her a priesthood blessing, sent her a copy of the talks from a recent general conference, and later asked Lora to share her thoughts on what she was grateful for, which he used in a talk at BYU–Hawaii.

“As Lora was recovering, Elder Andersen invited her to visit him in his office, showing her around the Church Administration Building.

“Several months later, when it became apparent that Lora’s time on earth was limited, Elder Andersen gave Lora a beautiful blessing, which brought her so much comfort in anticipating her passing from this life to the next. He later adjusted his travel schedule to speak at Lora’s funeral.

“We have been so impressed with the ability of Elder Andersen to carry out his global and family responsibilities and still take time for the one. He is truly an example of the Savior’s admonition to seek out and serve those in need.”

Opposite page, from left: With President James E. Faust following production of the movie *The Testaments of One Fold and One Shepherd* in 2000; speaking at a celebration in connection with the rededication of the São Paulo Brazil Temple in 2004; as mission president with President Boyd K. Packer while creating the Bordeaux France Stake in 1992; with Elder D. Todd Christofferson during the April 2009 general conference. Right: Elder and Sister Andersen with children and grandchildren in 2006.

A Servant of the Lord

Speaking of his father’s calling as an Apostle, son Brandt says, “This call is life changing, but it won’t change my parents’ lives. They are the same in private as they are in public.” All who know Elder Neil L. Andersen will agree.

It has been my blessing to have a close association with Elder Andersen during his service as a General Authority. The faith that was evident even in childhood sustains him still. He teaches the gospel with conviction, in large measure because he so faithfully lives it in every aspect of his life. His counsel is unflinchingly wise. I have observed that he is blessed with prophetic insights that I am confident will only grow with the mantle of his new calling as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As he embarked upon this sacred service, Elder Andersen humbly declared: “I take solace that in one qualification for the holy apostleship where there can be no latitude extended, the Lord has deeply blessed me. I do know with perfect and certain clarity through the power of the Holy Ghost that Jesus is the Christ, the Beloved Son of God.”³ ■

NOTES

1. Neil L. Andersen, “You Know Enough,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2008, 13.
2. Neil L. Andersen, “Come unto Him,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, May 2009, 79.
3. Neil L. Andersen, *Liahona* and *Ensign*, May 2009, 78.

