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Help Them on Their Way Home

We help God's children best by providing ways to build faith in Jesus Christ and His restored gospel when they are young.

Brothers and sisters, our Heavenly Father wants and needs our help to bring His spirit children home to Him again. I speak today of young people already within His true Church and so are started on the strait and narrow way to return to their heavenly home. He wants them to gain early the spiritual strength to stay on the path. And He needs our help to get them back to the path quickly should they begin to wander.

I was a young bishop when I began to see clearly why the Lord wants us to strengthen children when they are young and rescue them quickly. I will tell you one story of a young person who represents many whom I have tried to help over the years.

She sat across from me at my bishop's desk. She spoke to me of her life. She had been baptized and confirmed as a member of the Church when she was eight. There were no tears in her eyes as she recounted the more than 20 years that followed, but there was sadness in her voice. She said that the downward spiral began with choices to associate with what she thought were exciting people. She began to violate what at first seemed to be less important commandments.

She felt at first a little sadness and a twinge of guilt. But the associations with her friends provided a new feeling of being liked, and so her occasional resolutions to repent seemed less and less important. As the gravity of the commandments she was breaking increased, the dream of a happy eternal home seemed to fade.

She sat across from me in what she called misery. She wanted me to rescue her from the trap of sin in which she found herself bound. But the only way out was for her to exercise faith in Jesus Christ, to have a broken heart, to repent, and so be cleansed, changed, and strengthened through the Lord's Atonement. I bore my testimony to

her that it was still possible. And it was, but so much harder than it would have been to exercise faith early in her life on the journey home to God and when she first began to wander.

So we help God's children best by providing ways to build faith in Jesus Christ and His restored gospel when they are young. And then we must help rekindle that faith quickly before it dims as they wander off the path.

So you and I can expect a nearly continuous opportunity to help travelers among God's children. The Savior told us why that would be so when He described the perilous journey home for all of God's spirit children through the mists which sin and Satan create:

"Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, which leadeth to destruction, and many there be who go in thereat;

"Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."¹

Foreseeing the needs of His children, a loving Heavenly Father placed directions and rescuers along their way. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to make safe passage possible and visible. He called as His prophet in these times President Thomas S. Monson. Since his youth President Monson has taught not only how to stay on the



path but also how to rescue those who have been led away into sorrow.

Heavenly Father has assigned us to a great variety of stations to strengthen and, when needed, to lead travelers to safety. Our most important and powerful assignments are in the family. They are important because the family has the opportunity at the start of a child's life to put feet firmly on the path home. Parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents, aunts and uncles are made more powerful guides and rescuers by the bonds of love that are the very nature of a family.

The family has an advantage in the first eight years of a child's life. In those protected years, because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, Satan's use of the mists of darkness to hide the path to return home is blocked. In those precious years the Lord helps families by calling Primary workers to help strengthen children spiritually. He also provides holders of the Aaronic Priesthood to offer the sacrament. In those sacramental prayers, the children hear the promise that they may someday receive the Holy Ghost as a guide if they are obedient to God's commandments. As a result, they are fortified to resist temptation when it comes and then, sometime in the future, to go to the rescue of others.

Many bishops in the Church are inspired to call the strongest people in the ward to serve individual children in the Primary. They realize that if the children are strengthened with faith and testimony, they will be less likely to need rescue as teenagers. They realize that a strong spiritual foundation can make the difference for a lifetime.

We all can help. Grandmothers, grandfathers, and every member who knows a child can help. It doesn't take a formal calling in Primary. Nor is it



limited by age. One such woman, as a younger person, was on the Primary general board that helped create the CTR motto.

She never tired of serving the children. She taught in the Primary of her ward, at her own request, until she was almost 90 years old. Little children could feel her love for them. They saw her example. They learned from her the simple principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And above all, because of her example they learned to feel and recognize the Holy Ghost. And when they did, they were well on their way to the faith to resist temptation. They would be less likely to need to be rescued and would be prepared to go to the rescue of others.

I learned the power of simple faith in prayer and in the Holy Ghost when our children were small. Our oldest

son was not yet baptized. His parents, Primary teachers, and priesthood servants had tried to help him feel and recognize the Spirit and know how to receive His help.

One afternoon my wife had taken him to the home of a woman who was teaching him to read. Our plan was that I was to pick him up on my way home from work.

His lesson ended earlier than we had expected. He felt confident that he knew the way home. So he started to walk. He said afterward that he had complete confidence and liked the idea of being alone on the trip. After he had gone about half a mile (0.8 km), it started to grow dark. He began to sense that he was still very far from home.

He can still remember that the lights of the cars as they streamed past



him were blurred by his tears. He felt like a little child, not the confident boy who had begun to walk home alone. He realized that he needed help. Then something came to his memory. He knew he was supposed to pray. And so he left the road and headed toward some trees he could barely see in the darkness. He found a place to kneel down.

Through the bushes he could hear voices coming toward him. Two young people had heard him crying. As they approached, they said, “Can we help you?” Through his tears he told them he was lost and that he wanted to go home. They asked if he knew his home phone number or address. He didn’t. They asked if he knew his name. He did know that. They led him to the nearby place where they lived. They found our family name in a phone book.

When I got the phone call, I rushed to the rescue, grateful that kind people had been placed along his way home. And I have been ever grateful he was taught to pray with faith that help would come when he was lost. That faith has led him to safety and brought him more rescuers more times than he can count.

The Lord has placed a pattern of rescue and rescuers in His kingdom. In His wisdom the Lord has inspired His servants to place some of the most powerful ways to strengthen us and to put in place the best rescuers as we pass through the teenage years.

You know of two powerful programs provided by the Lord. One, for young women, is called Personal Progress. The other, for Aaronic

Priesthood holders, is called Duty to God. We encourage young people in the rising generation to see their own potential to build great spiritual strength. And we plead with those who care about those young people to rise to what the Lord requires of us to help them. And since the future of the Church depends upon them, all of us care.

The two programs have been improved, but their purpose remains unchanged. President Monson put it this way: we must “learn what we should learn, do what we should do, and be what we should be.”²

The *Personal Progress* booklet for young women makes the purpose clear for them: “The Personal Progress program uses the eight Young Women values to help you understand more fully who you are, why you are here on the earth, and what you should be doing as a daughter of God to prepare for the day you go to the temple to make sacred covenants.”

It goes on to say that young women will “make commitments, carry them out, and report your progress to a parent or leader.” It also promises that “the patterns you establish as you work on Personal Progress—such as prayer, scripture study, service, and journal keeping—will become personal daily habits. These habits will strengthen your testimony and help you learn and improve throughout your life.”³

The Duty to God program for young men in the Aaronic Priesthood has been strengthened and focused. It will be contained in one simple book for all three Aaronic Priesthood offices. The young men and their leaders will receive a copy of this new book. It is a powerful tool. It will strengthen the testimonies of young men and their relationship with God. It will help

them learn and want to fulfill their priesthood duties. It will strengthen their relationships with their parents, among quorum members, and with their leaders.

Both of these programs put great responsibility on the efforts of the young people themselves. They are invited to learn and do things that would be challenging for anyone. As I reflect on my own youth, I cannot remember being so challenged. Oh, on a few occasions I was invited to rise to such tests, but only now and then. These programs expect consistency, great effort, and the accumulation of learning and spiritual experiences over years.

On reflection I realized that the contents of these booklets are a physical representation of the Lord’s trust in the rising generation and in all of us who love them. And I have seen evidence that the trust is well placed.

In visits I watched Aaronic Priesthood quorums in action. I have seen young men following patterns of learning, making plans to do what God wants of them, then moving out to do what they have committed to do and sharing with others how they were changed spiritually. And as I watched and listened, it became clear that fathers, mothers, leaders, friends, and even neighbors in a congregation were touched by the Spirit as they heard youth testify how they had been strengthened. The youth were lifted as they bore testimony, and so were those who were trying to help them rise.

The Young Women program has in it that same powerful pattern to develop spiritual strength in the young women and to offer the opportunity for us to help. Personal Progress helps young women prepare to receive the ordinances of the temple. They are helped by the examples of mothers,

grandmothers, and every righteous woman around them in the Church. I have seen how parents helped a daughter achieve her goals and dreams by noticing and appreciating all the good things she does.

Just a few days ago I watched a mother stand with her young daughter as they received recognition for having together become examples of outstanding womanhood. And as they shared with me what it had meant to them, I felt the Lord's approval and encouragement for us all.

Of all the help we can give these young people, the greatest will be to let them feel our confidence that they are on the path home to God and that they can make it. And we do that best by going with them. Because the path is steep and sometimes rocky, they will at times feel discouraged and even stumble. They may at times become confused about their destination and wander after less eternally important goals. These inspired programs make that less likely because they will lead the young person to invite and receive the companionship of the Holy Ghost.

The best counsel for us to give young people is that they can arrive back to Heavenly Father only as they are guided and corrected by the Spirit of God. So if we are wise, we will encourage, praise, and exemplify everything which invites the companionship of the Holy Ghost. When they share with us what they are doing and feeling, we must ourselves have qualified for the Spirit. Then they will feel in our praise and our smiles the approval of God. And should we feel the need to give corrective counsel, they will feel our love and the love of God in it, not rebuke and rejection, which can permit Satan to lead them further away.

The example they most need from us is to do what they must do. We



need to pray for the gifts of the Spirit. We need to ponder in the scriptures and in the words of living prophets. We need to make plans which are not only wishes but covenants. And then we need to keep our promises to the Lord. And we need to lift others by sharing with them the blessings of the Atonement which have come in our lives.

And we need to exemplify in our own lives the steady and prolonged faithfulness that the Lord expects of them. As we do, we will help them feel from the Spirit an assurance that if they will persist, they will hear the words from a loving Savior and Heavenly Father: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord."⁴

And we who help them along the way will hear those words with joy.

I testify that the Lord loves you and every child of God. This is His kingdom, restored with priesthood keys through the Prophet Joseph Smith. Thomas S. Monson is the Lord's prophet today. I promise each of you, as you follow inspired direction in this, the true Church of Jesus Christ, that our youth and we who help and love them can be delivered safely to our home with Heavenly Father and the Savior to live in families and in joy forever. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. 3 Nephi 14:13–14.
2. Thomas S. Monson, "To Learn, to Do, to Be," *Liabona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2008, 67.
3. *Young Women Personal Progress* (booklet, 2009), 6.
4. Matthew 25:21.