
The 189th Annual General Conference

A Reader's and Wide-Margin Study Edition of talks from the General Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

April 2019



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This is a redesigned layout of talks given at the 189th Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in April 2019.

The intention of this publication is to redesign the content to provide 1) more readable typography, 2) contextual access to speaker notes and external references, 3) layouts for double-sided single talks or a bound version, and 4) wider margins for notetaking. Certain liberties in the typographic design such as additional paragraphing and quotations and blockquotes are present, but no content is omitted or added from the original material in the May 2019 issue of the *Ensign* or from <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/general-conference/2019/04>. There is no claim of copyright of any information or content herein.

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Contents

SATURDAY MORNING SESSION

How Can I Understand?3

Elder Ulisses Soares

Careful versus Casual 9

Becky Craven

Answers to Prayer15

Elder Brook P. Hales

Missionary Work: Sharing What Is in Your Heart 23

Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf

Just as He Did.....31

Bishop W. Christopher Waddell

A Home Where the Spirit of the Lord Dwells 37

President Henry B. Eyring

SATURDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

The Sustaining of Church Officers..... 45

Church Auditing Department Report, 2018 49

The True, Pure, and Simple Gospel of Jesus Christ51

President M. Russell Ballard

Seeking Knowledge the Spirit.....57

Elder Mathias Held

The Eye of Faith..... 63

Elder Neil L. Andersen

Feasting upon the Words of Christ71

Elder Takashi Wada

Hearing His Voice 77

Elder David P. Homer

Behold the Lamb of God..... 83

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland



SATURDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

Your Priesthood Playbook..... 89

Elder Gary E. Stevenson

The Quorum: A Place of Belonging 97

Elder Carl B. Cook

Look unto Jesus Christ 103

Elder Kim B. Clark

The Power of Sustaining Faith111

President Henry B. Eyring

Where Will This Lead?117

President Dallin H. Oaks

We Can Do Better and Be Better 123

President Russell M. Nelson

SUNDAY MORNING SESSION

Abound with Blessings..... 129

Elder Dale G. Renlund

Christ: The Light That Shines in Darkness137

Sharon Eubank

Great Love for Our Father’s Children 143

Elder Quentin L. Cook

Preparing for the Lord’s Return151

Elder D. Todd Christofferson

The Atonement of Jesus Christ..... 159

Tad R. Callister

“Come, Follow Me” 165

President Russell M. Nelson

SUNDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

Cleansed Repentance171

President Dallin H. Oaks

Exercising Our Spiritual Muscles 179

Elder Juan Pablo Villar

Good Shepherd, Lamb of God 183

Elder Gerrit W. Gong

Prepared to Obtain Every Needful Thing 191

Elder David A. Bednar

The Immediate Goodness of God 199

Elder Kyle S. McKay

Build a Fortress of Spirituality and Protection 205

Elder Ronald A. Rasband

Closing Remarks 213

President Russell M. Nelson



APRIL 2019

TALKS FROM THE 189TH GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

Highlights from the 189th Annual General Conference

Since President Russell M. Nelson was sustained as President of the Church, a number of important changes have been announced at general conference.

So it was only natural that members might anticipate more changes this conference. But Church leaders focused on a different kind of change — the change that the Savior can work within each of us.

A Prophet's Plea

“When Jesus asks you and me to ‘repent,’ He is inviting us to change,” said President Nelson.

“... Identify what stops you from repenting. And then, change! Repent! All of us can do better and be better than ever before.”

Read President Nelson's invitation to repent.

For more about how we can enjoy the blessings of repentance, see addresses by:

- President Dallin H. Oaks
- President Henry B. Eyring
- Tad R. Callister

Changes in the Church

Many speakers spoke about previously announced changes. President M. Russell Ballard encouraged us not to lose “the spiritual purposes of these adjustments ... in the excitement about the changes themselves.”

- Read President Ballard's invitation to focus on the simple truths of the gospel.
- Learn from Elder Jeffrey R. Holland how the meeting schedule change should improve our focus on the sacrament.

- Find out from Elder David A. Bednar the desired results of focusing on home-centered learning.
- See an abbreviated list of changes announced since President Nelson was sustained as President, and consider their spiritual purposes.

New and Renovated Temples

President Nelson closed the conference by announcing eight new temples and major changes planned for pioneer-era temples. But he emphasized the need for personal renovation. “May we renovate our lives through our faith and trust in Him,” he said.

Read President Nelson’s closing remarks.

- Find the list of new temples.
- Learn more about plans for the Salt Lake Temple at [ChurchofJesusChrist.org/go/o5194](https://www.ChurchofJesusChrist.org/go/o5194).

How Can I Understand?

By Elder Ulisses Soares
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



When we earnestly, heartily, firmly, and sincerely seek to learn the gospel of Jesus Christ and teach it to one another, these teachings may transform hearts.

MY DEAR BROTHERS and sisters, what a great joy it is to be here together again in this general conference for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints under the direction of our beloved prophet, President Russell M. Nelson. I testify to you that we will have the privilege of hearing the voice of our Savior, Jesus Christ, through the teachings of those who pray, sing, and speak to the needs of our day in this conference.

As recorded in the book of Acts, Philip the evangelist taught the gospel to a certain Ethiopian who was a eunuch in charge of all the treasures belonging to the queen of Ethiopia.¹ While returning from worshipping in Jerusalem, he read the book of Isaiah. Compelled by the Spirit, Philip came closer to him and said, “Understandest thou what thou readest?”

“And [the eunuch] said, How can I, except some man should guide me? ...

“Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.”²

The question asked by this Ethiopian man is a reminder of the divine mandate we all have to seek to learn and to teach one

1. See Acts 8:27.

2. Acts 8:30–31, 35.

another the gospel of Jesus Christ.³ In fact, in the context of learning and teaching the gospel, we are sometimes like the Ethiopian — we need the help of a faithful and inspired teacher; and we are sometimes like Philip — we need to teach and strengthen others in their conversion.

Our purpose as we seek to learn and to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ must be to increase faith in God and in His divine plan of happiness and in Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice and to achieve lasting conversion. Such increased faith and conversion will help us make and keep covenants with God, thus strengthening our desire to follow Jesus and producing a genuine spiritual transformation in us — in other words, transforming us into a new creature, as taught by the Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Corinthians.⁴ This transformation will bring us a more happy, productive, and healthy life and help us to maintain an eternal perspective. Isn't this exactly what happened to the Ethiopian eunuch after he learned about the Savior and was converted to His gospel? The scripture says that "he went on his way rejoicing."⁵

The commandment to learn the gospel and teach it to one another is not new; it has been constantly repeated from the beginning of human history.⁶ On one particular occasion, while Moses and his people were in the plains of Moab before entering the promised land, the Lord inspired him to admonish his people concerning their responsibility to learn the statutes and covenants they had received from the Lord and to teach them to their posterity,⁷ many of whom had not personally experienced the crossing of the Red Sea or the revelation given on Mount Sinai.

Moses admonished his people:

"Hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you. ..."

3. See Doctrine & Covenants 88:77–78, 118; 130:18–19; 131:6.

4. See 2 Corinthians 5:17.

5. Acts 8:39.

6. See Moses 6:52, 57–58; Deuteronomy 4:5, 14; 5:1; Doctrine & Covenants 43:8–9; 130:18–19; 136:32.

7. See Deuteronomy 4:10.

“... Teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons.”⁸

Then Moses concluded, saying, “Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, for ever.”⁹

God’s prophets have consistently instructed that we need to raise our families “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord”¹⁰ and “in light and truth.”¹¹ President Nelson recently said, “In this day of rampant immorality and addictive pornography, parents have a sacred responsibility to teach their children the importance of God [and Jesus Christ] in their lives.”¹²

Brothers and sisters, the warning of our beloved prophet is a further reminder of our individual responsibility to seek to learn and to teach our families that there is a Father in Heaven who loves us and who has developed a divine plan of happiness for His children; that Jesus Christ, His Son, is the Redeemer of the world; and that salvation comes from faith in His name.¹³ Our lives need to be rooted upon the rock of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, which might help us individually and as families to have our own spiritual impressions engraved in our hearts, helping us to endure in our faith.¹⁴

You may recall that two disciples of John the Baptist followed Jesus Christ after hearing John witness that Jesus was the Lamb of God, the Messiah. These good men accepted Jesus’s invitation to “come and see”¹⁵ and abode with Him that day. They came to know that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, and followed Him for the rest of their lives.

Likewise, when we accept the Savior’s invitation to “come and see,” we need to abide in Him, immersing ourselves in the scriptures, rejoicing in them, learning His doctrine, and striving to live the way He lived. Only then will we come to know Him,

8. Deuteronomy 4:1, 9.

9. Deuteronomy 4:40.

10. Ephesians 6:4; Enos 1:1.

11. Doctrine & Covenants 93:40.

12. Russell M. Nelson, “Salvation and

Exaltation,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2008, 9.

13. See Mosiah 3:9.

14. See Helaman 5:12.

15. See John 1:38–39.

Jesus Christ, and recognize His voice, knowing that as we come unto Him and believe in Him, we shall never hunger nor thirst.¹⁶ We will be able to discern the truth at all times, as occurred to those two disciples who abode with Jesus that day.

Brothers and sisters, that doesn't happen by chance. Attuning ourselves to the highest influences of godliness is not a simple matter; it requires calling upon God and learning how to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to the center of our lives. If we do so, I promise that the influence of the Holy Ghost will bring truth to our heart and mind and will bear witness of it,¹⁷ teaching all things.¹⁸

The Ethiopian's question, "How can I [understand], except some man should guide me?" also has a special meaning in the context of our individual responsibility to put the principles of the gospel we have learned into practice in our lives. In the Ethiopian's case, for example, he acted upon the truth he learned from Philip. He asked to be baptized. He came to know that Jesus Christ was the Son of God.¹⁹

Brothers and sisters, our actions must reflect what we learn and teach. We need to show our beliefs through the way we live. The best teacher is a good role model. Teaching something that we truly live can make a difference in the hearts of those we teach. If we desire people, whether that be family or not, to joyfully treasure up the scriptures and the teachings of living apostles and prophets of our day, they need to see our souls delighting in them. Likewise, if we want them to know that President Russell M. Nelson is the prophet, seer, and revelator in our day, they need to see us raise our hands to sustain him and realize that we follow his inspired teachings. As the well-known American saying goes, "Actions speak louder than words."

Maybe some of you are at this exact moment asking yourselves, "Elder Soares, I have been doing all these things and have been following this model both individually and as a family, but unfortunately, some of my friends or dear ones have distanced themselves from the Lord. What should I do?" For those of you

16. See John 6:35.

17. See John 16:13.

18. See John 14:26.

19. See Acts 8:37–38.

who are right now experiencing these feelings of sadness, agony, and maybe regret, please know that they are not totally lost because the Lord knows where they are and is watching over them. Remember, they are His children too!

It is hard to understand all the reasons why some people take another path. The best we can do in these circumstances is just to love and embrace them, pray for their well-being, and seek for the Lord's help to know what to do and say. Sincerely rejoice with them in their successes; be their friends and look for the good in them. We should never give up on them but preserve our relationships. Never reject or misjudge them. Just love them! The parable of the prodigal son teaches us that when children come to themselves, they often desire to come home. If that happens with your dear ones, fill your hearts with compassion, run to them, fall on their neck, and kiss them, like the father of the prodigal son did.²⁰

Ultimately, keep living a worthy life, be a good example to them of what you believe, and draw closer to our Savior, Jesus Christ. He knows and understands our deep sorrows and pains, and He will bless your efforts and dedication to your dear ones if not in this life, in the next life. Remember, brothers and sisters, always that hope is an important part of the gospel plan.

Throughout many years of service in the Church, I have seen faithful members who have consistently applied these principles in their lives. This is the case of a single mother whom I will refer to as "Mary." Sadly, Mary went through a tragic divorce. At that point in time, Mary recognized that her most critical decisions relating to her family would be spiritual. Would praying, scripture study, fasting, and church and temple attendance continue to be important to her?

Mary had always been faithful, and at that critical juncture, she decided to cling to what she already knew to be true. She found strength in "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," which, among many wonderful principles, teaches that "parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness"

20. See Luke 15:20.

and to teach them to always observe God's commandments.²¹ She continually searched for answers from the Lord and shared them with her four children in every family setting. They frequently discussed the gospel and shared their experiences and testimonies with one another.

Despite the sorrows they went through, her children developed a love for Christ's gospel and a desire to serve and share it with others. Three of them faithfully served full-time missions, and the youngest is now serving in South America. Her oldest daughter, whom I know pretty well, who is now married and strong in her faith, shared, "I never felt like my mom raised us alone because the Lord was always in our home. As she bore her witness of Him to us, we each began to turn to Him with our own questions. I am so grateful she brought the gospel to life."

Brothers and sisters, this good mother was able to make her home a center of spiritual learning. Similar to the Ethiopian's question, Mary asked herself several times, "How can my children learn except a mother should guide them?"

My dear companions in the gospel, I testify to you that when we earnestly, heartily, firmly, and sincerely seek to learn the gospel of Jesus Christ and teach it to one another with real purpose and under the influence of the Spirit, these teachings may transform hearts and inspire a desire to live according to the truths of God.

I testify that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. He is the Redeemer, and He lives. I know He directs His Church through His prophets, seers, and revelators. I also testify to you that God lives, that He loves us. He wants us back in His presence — all of us. He listens to our prayers. I bear my testimony of these truths in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

21. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2017, 145.

Careful versus Casual

By Becky Craven

Second Counselor in the Young Women General Presidency



As the influences of the world increasingly embrace the evil, we must strive with all diligence to stay firmly on the path that leads us safely to our Savior.

I ONCE SAW a sign in a store window that said, “Happiness, \$15.00.” I was so curious to know how much happiness I could buy for \$15 that I went inside to see. What I found was a lot of cheap trinkets and souvenirs — not one thing I saw could possibly bring me the type of happiness that the sign implied! Over the years, I’ve thought many times about that sign and how easy it can be to look for happiness in items that are cheap or temporary. As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we are blessed to know how and where true happiness is found. It is found in carefully living the gospel established by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and in striving to become more like Him.

We have a dear friend who was a train engineer. One day while he was driving a train on his route, he spotted a car stopped on the track ahead of him. He quickly realized that the car was stuck and unable to cross the track. He immediately put the train in emergency mode, which engaged the brakes on each boxcar that extended three-quarters of a mile (1.2 km) behind the engine, carrying a load of 6,500 tons (5,900 metric tons). There was no physical chance that the train would be able to stop before it hit the car, which it did. Fortunately for the people in the car, they heard the warning of the train whistle and escaped from the car before the impact. As the engineer

spoke with the investigating police officer, an angry woman approached them. She shouted that she had seen the whole incident and then testified that the engineer did not even try to swerve out of the way to miss the car!

Obviously, if the engineer had been able to swerve and leave the tracks to avoid an accident, he and his entire train would have been lost in a derailment and the train's forward progress would have come to an abrupt stop. Fortunately for him, the rails of the tracks on which his train ran kept the wheels of the train snugly moving toward its destination regardless of the obstacle in his way. Fortunately for us, we too are on a track, a covenant path we committed to when we were baptized as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Although we may encounter occasional obstacles along the way, this path will keep us moving toward our prized eternal destination if we stay firmly on it.

The vision of the tree of life shows us how the effects of casualness can lead us away from the covenant path. Consider that the rod of iron and the strait and narrow path, or the covenant path, led directly to the tree of life, where all the blessings provided by our Savior and His Atonement are available to the faithful. Also seen in the vision was a river of water representing the filthiness of the world. The scriptures describe that this river "ran along" the path yet passed only "near" the tree, not to it. The world is laden with distractions that can deceive even the elect, causing them to be casual in living their covenants — thus leading them near the tree, but not to it. If we are not careful in living our covenants with exactness, our casual efforts may eventually lead us into forbidden paths or to join with those who have already entered the great and spacious building. If not careful, we may even drown in the depths of a filthy river.¹

There is a careful way and a casual way to do everything, including living the gospel. As we consider our commitment to the Savior, are we careful or casual? Because of our mortal nature, don't we sometimes rationalize our behavior, at times

1. See 1 Nephi 8; 15.

referring to our actions as being in *the gray*, or mixing good with something that's not so good? Anytime we say, "however," "except," or "but" when it applies to following the counsel of our prophet leaders or living the gospel carefully, we are in fact saying, "That counsel does not apply to me." We can rationalize all we want, but the fact is, *there is not a right way to do the wrong thing!*

The youth theme for 2019 is taken from John 14:15, where the Lord instructs, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." If we love Him as we claim, can't we show that love by being a little more careful in living His commandments?

Being careful in living the gospel does not necessarily mean being formal or stuffy. What it does mean is being appropriate in our thoughts and behavior as disciples of Jesus Christ. As we ponder the difference between careful and casual in our gospel living, here are some thoughts to consider:

- Are we careful in our Sabbath-day worship and in our preparation to partake of the sacrament each week?
- Could we be more careful in our prayers and scripture study or be more actively engaged in *Come, Follow Me — For Individuals and Families*?
- Are we careful in our temple worship, and do we carefully and deliberately live the covenants we made both at baptism and in the temple? Are we careful in our appearance and modest in our dress, especially in sacred places and circumstances? Are we careful in how we wear the sacred temple garments? Or do the fashions of the world dictate a more casual attitude?
- Are we careful in how we minister to others and in how we fulfill our callings in the Church, or are we indifferent or casual in our call to serve?
- Are we careful or casual in what we read and what we watch on TV and our mobile devices? Are we careful in our language? Or do we casually embrace the crude and vulgar?

The *For the Strength of Youth* pamphlet contains standards that, when followed carefully, will bring rich blessings and help us stay on the covenant path. Although it was written for the

benefit of the youth, its standards do not expire when we leave the Young Men and Young Women programs. They apply to each of us all the time. A review of these standards may prompt other ways we can be more careful in our gospel living.

We do not lower our standards to fit in or to make someone else feel comfortable. We are disciples of Jesus Christ, and as such we are about elevating others, lifting them to a higher, holier place where they too can reap greater blessings.

I invite each of us to seek the guidance of the Holy Ghost to know what adjustments we need to make in our lives to be more carefully aligned with our covenants. I also plead with you not to be critical of others making this same journey. “Judgment is mine, saith the Lord.”² We are each in the process of growth and change.

The story told in the Book of Mormon about the apostate Amlicites is interesting to me. As a way of noting to others that they were no longer associated with Jesus Christ and His Church, they put a distinct mark of red on their foreheads for all to see.³ In an opposite way, and as disciples of Jesus Christ, how do we mark ourselves? Can others easily see His image in our countenance and know who we represent by the way we carefully conduct our lives?

As a covenant people, we are not meant to blend in with the rest of the world. We have been called “a peculiar people”⁴ — what a compliment! As the influences of the world increasingly embrace the evil, we must strive with all diligence to stay firmly on the path that leads us safely to our Savior, widening the distance between our covenant living and worldly influences.

As I reflect upon obtaining lasting happiness, I realize that sometimes we do find ourselves in the gray. Mists of darkness are inevitable as we journey along the covenant path. Temptation and casualness can cause us to subtly divert our course into the darkness of the world and away from the

2. Mormon 8:20.

3. See Alma 3:4.

4. 1 Peter 2:9.

covenant path. For the times when this might happen, our beloved prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, has urged us to get back on the covenant path and to do so quickly. How grateful I am for the gift of repentance and for the power of our Savior's Atonement.

It's impossible to live a perfect life. Only one man was able to live perfectly while dwelling on this telestial planet. That was Jesus Christ. Although we may not be perfect, brothers and sisters, we can be worthy: worthy to partake of the sacrament, worthy of temple blessings, and worthy to receive personal revelation.

King Benjamin testified of the blessings and happiness that come to those who carefully follow the Savior:

"And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness."⁵

Can happiness be bought with \$15? No, it can't. Deep and lasting happiness comes by intentionally and carefully living the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

5. Mosiah 2:41.

Answers to Prayer

By Elder Brook P. Hales
Of the Seventy

The Father is aware of us, knows our needs, and will help us perfectly.



AN IMPORTANT AND comforting doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that our Heavenly Father has perfect love for His children. Because of that perfect love, He blesses us not only according to our desires and needs but also according to His infinite wisdom. As simply stated by the prophet Nephi, “I know that [God] loveth his children.”¹

One aspect of that perfect love is our Heavenly Father’s involvement in the details of our lives, even when we may not be aware of it or understand it. We seek the Father’s divine guidance and help through heartfelt, earnest prayer. When we honor our covenants and strive to be more like our Savior, we are entitled to a constant² stream of divine guidance through the influence and inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

The scriptures teach us, “For your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him,”³ and He “knoweth all things, for all things are present before [His] eyes.”⁴

The prophet Mormon is an example of this. He did not live to see the results of his work. Yet he understood that the Lord was carefully leading him along. When he felt inspired to include the small plates of Nephi with his record, Mormon wrote: “And I do this for a wise purpose; for thus it whispereth me, according to the workings of the Spirit of the Lord which is in me. And now, I

1. 1 Nephi 11:17; see also 1 John 4:8.

2. See Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2018, 93–96.

3. Matthew 6:8.

4. Doctrine and Covenants 38:2.

do not know all things; but the Lord knoweth all things which are to come; wherefore, he worketh in me to do according to his will.”⁵ Although Mormon did not know of the future loss of the 116 manuscript pages, the Lord did and prepared a way to overcome that obstacle long before it occurred.

The Father is aware of us, knows our needs, and will help us perfectly. Sometimes that help is given in the very moment or at least soon after we ask for divine help. Sometimes our most earnest and worthy desires are not answered in the way we hope, but we find that God has greater blessings in store. And sometimes our righteous desires are not granted in this life. I will illustrate, through three different accounts, the ways our Father in Heaven may answer our earnest petitions to Him.

Our youngest son was called to serve as a missionary in the France Paris Mission. In preparation to serve, we went with him to purchase the usual shirts, suits, ties, and socks, and an overcoat. Unfortunately, the overcoat he wanted was not immediately in stock in the size he needed. However, the store clerk indicated that the coat would become available in a few weeks and would be delivered to the missionary training center in Provo prior to our son’s departure for France. We paid for the coat and thought nothing more of it.

Our son entered the missionary training center in June, and the overcoat was delivered just days before his scheduled departure in August. He did not try on the coat but hurriedly packed it in his luggage with his clothing and other items.

As winter approached in Paris, where our son was serving, he wrote to us that he had pulled out the overcoat and tried it on but found that it was far too small. We therefore had to deposit extra funds in his bank account so that he could buy another coat in Paris, which he did. With some irritation, I wrote to him and told him to give the first coat away, inasmuch as he couldn’t use it.

We later received this email from him:

5. Words of Mormon 1:7.

"It is very, very cold here.... The wind seems to go right through us, although my new coat is great and quite heavy.... I gave my old one to [another missionary in our apartment] who said that he had been praying for a way to get a better coat. He is a convert of several years and he has only his mom ... and the missionary who baptized him who are supporting him on his mission and so the coat was an answer to a prayer, so I felt very happy about that."⁶

Heavenly Father knew that this missionary, who was serving in France some 6,200 miles (10,000 km) away from home, would urgently need a new overcoat for a cold winter in Paris but that this missionary would not have the means to buy one. Heavenly Father also knew that our son would receive from the clothing store in Provo, Utah, an overcoat that would be far too small. He knew that these two missionaries would be serving together in Paris and that the coat would be an answer to the humble and earnest prayer of a missionary who had an immediate need.

The Savior taught:

"Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.

"But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

"Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows."⁷

In other situations, when our worthy desires are not granted in the way we had hoped, it may actually be for our ultimate benefit. For example, Joseph the son of Jacob was envied and hated by his brothers to the point that they plotted Joseph's murder. Instead, they sold him as a slave into Egypt.⁸ If ever a person might have felt that his prayers were not answered in the way he had hoped, it could have been Joseph. In reality, his apparent misfortune resulted in great blessings to him and saved his family from starvation. Later, after having become a trusted leader in Egypt, with great faith and wisdom he said to his brothers:

"Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.

6. Personal correspondence.

8. See Genesis 37:20, 26–28.

7. Matthew 10:29–31.

"For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest.

"And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

"So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God."⁹

While in college, our oldest son was hired into a very desirable part-time student job that had the potential to lead to a wonderful, permanent job after graduation. He worked hard at this student job for four years, became highly qualified, and was well respected by his coworkers and supervisors. At the end of his senior year, almost as if orchestrated by heaven (at least to our son's way of thinking), the permanent position did open up, and he was the leading candidate, with every indication and expectation that, indeed, he would get the job.

Well, he was not hired. None of us could understand it. He had prepared well, had interviewed well, was the most qualified candidate, and had prayed with great hope and expectation! He was devastated and crushed, and the entire episode left all of us scratching our heads. Why had God abandoned him in his righteous desire?

It wasn't until several years later that the answer became very clear. Had he received the dream job after graduation, he would have missed a critical, life-changing opportunity that has now proved to be for his eternal benefit and blessing. God knew the end from the beginning (as He always does), and in this case the answer to many righteous prayers was no, in favor of a far superior outcome.

And sometimes, the answer to prayer that we so righteously, desperately, and earnestly seek is not given in this life.

Sister Patricia Parkinson was born with normal eyesight, but at age seven she began to go blind. At age nine, Pat began attending the Utah Schools for the Deaf and Blind in Ogden, Utah, some 90 miles (145 km) from her home, necessitating

9. Genesis 45:5–8.

her boarding at the school — which included all of the homesickness that a nine-year-old could possibly experience.

By age 11, she had completely lost her eyesight. Pat returned home permanently at age 15 to attend her local high school. She went on to college and graduated with an undergraduate degree in communication disorders and psychology, and after a heroic struggle against doubting university admissions officials, she entered graduate school and completed a master's degree in speech language pathology. Pat now works with 53 elementary school students and supervises four speech-language technicians in her school district. She owns her own home and her own automobile, which friends and family members drive when Pat needs transportation.

At age 10, Pat was scheduled to have yet another medical procedure to address her diminishing eyesight. Her parents had always told her exactly what was going to happen in terms of her medical care, but for some reason they didn't tell her about this particular procedure. When her parents did tell her that the procedure had been scheduled, Pat, in the words of her mother, "was a mess." Pat ran to the other room but came back later and said to her parents with some indignation, "Let me tell you what. I know it, God knows it, and you might as well know it too. I am going to be blind the rest of my life!"

Several years ago, Pat traveled to California to visit family members who were living there. While she was outside with her three-year-old nephew, he said to her, "Aunt Pat, why don't you just ask Heavenly Father to give you new eyes? Because if you ask Heavenly Father, He will give you whatever you want. You just have to ask Him."

Pat said she was taken aback by the question but responded, "Well, sometimes Heavenly Father doesn't work like that. Sometimes He needs you to learn something, and so He doesn't give you everything you want. Sometimes you have to wait. Heavenly Father and the Savior know best what is good for us and what we need. So They aren't going to grant you everything you want in the moment you want it."

I've known Pat for many years and recently told her that I admired the fact that she is always positive and happy. She responded, "Well, you have not been at home with me, have you? I have my moments. I've had rather severe bouts of depression, and I've cried a lot." However, she added, "From the time I started losing my sight, it was strange, but I knew that Heavenly Father and the Savior were with my family and me. We handled it the best way we could, and in my opinion, we handled it the right way. I have ended up being a successful enough person, and generally I have been a happy person. I remember His hand being in everything. To those who ask me if I am angry because I am blind, I respond, 'Who would I be angry with? Heavenly Father is in this with me; I am not alone. He is with me all the time.'"

In this case, Pat's desire to regain her sight will not be granted in this life. But her motto, learned from her father, is "This too shall pass."¹⁰

President Henry B. Eyring stated, "The Father is at this moment aware of you, your feelings, and the spiritual and temporal needs of everyone around you."¹¹ This great and comforting truth can be found in the three experiences I have recounted.

Brothers and sisters, sometimes our prayers are answered quickly with the outcome we hope for. Sometimes our prayers are not answered in the way we hope for, yet with time we learn that God had greater blessings prepared for us than we initially anticipated. And sometimes our righteous petitions to God will not be granted in this life.¹² As Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, "Faith also includes trust in God's timing."¹³

We have the assurance that in His own way and in His own time, Heavenly Father will bless us and resolve all of our concerns, injustices, and disappointments.

10. From a personal interview with Patricia Parkinson, Dec. 10, 2018.

11. Henry B. Eyring, "His Spirit to Be with You," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2018, 88.

12. See Jeffrey R. Holland, "An High Priest of Good Things to Come," *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 36–38; *Liahona*, Jan. 2000, 42–45.

13. Neal A. Maxwell, "Lest Ye Be Wearied and Faint in Your Minds," *Ensign*, May 1991, 90.

To quote King Benjamin: “And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it.”¹⁴

I know that God hears our prayers.¹⁵ I know that as an all-knowing, loving Father, He answers our prayers perfectly, according to His infinite wisdom, and in ways that will be to our ultimate benefit and blessing. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

14. Mosiah 2:41.

15. See “Power of Prayer,” mormon.org/beliefs/power-of-prayer

Missionary Work: Sharing What Is in Your Heart

By Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



Wherever you are on this earth, there are plenty of opportunities to share the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

LAST MONTH THE Twelve were invited by our dear prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, to travel with him to the dedication of the Rome Italy Temple. While traveling, I thought about the Apostle Paul and his journeys. In his day, to get from Jerusalem to Rome, it would have taken about 40 days. Today, in one of my favorite airplanes, it takes less than 3 hours.

Bible scholars believe that Paul was in Rome when he wrote several of his letters, which were key in strengthening Church members then as well as today.

Paul and the other members of the ancient Church, the *Early-day Saints*, were intimately familiar with sacrifice. Many were severely persecuted, even unto death.

In the last 200 years, the members of the restored Church of Jesus Christ, the *Latter-day Saints*, have also experienced persecution in many forms. But in spite of that persecution (and sometimes because of it), The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has continued to grow and is now found all across the globe.

There Is Much to Do

However, before we bake a cake, throw confetti, and congratulate ourselves on this remarkable success, we would do well to put that growth into perspective.

There are roughly seven and a half billion people in the world, compared to some 16 million members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints — a very small flock indeed.¹

Meanwhile, the numbers of Christian believers in some parts of the world are shrinking.²

Even in the Lord's restored Church — while overall membership continues to grow — there are too many who do not claim the blessings of regular Church participation.

In other words, wherever you are on this earth, there are plenty of opportunities to share the good news³ of the gospel of Jesus Christ with people you meet, study with, and live with or work and socialize with.

During this past year, I have had the exciting opportunity to be deeply involved with the worldwide missionary activities of the Church. I have often pondered and prayed about the Savior's great commission to His disciples — us, His children — to “go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”⁴

1. The great prophet Nephi saw in vision that even though the Church of the Lamb of God would spread “upon all the face of the earth,” because of wickedness in the world its overall “numbers [would be] few” (1 Nephi 14:12; see also Luke 12:32).

2. For example, a recent study by the Pew Research Center found that in the United States, “the percentage of adults (ages 18 and older) who describe themselves as Christians has dropped by nearly eight percentage points in just seven years, from 78.4% in ... 2007 to 70.6% in 2014. Over the same period, the percentage of Americans who are religiously unaffiliated — describing themselves as atheist, agnostic or

‘nothing in particular’ — has jumped more than six points, from 16.1% to 22.8%” (“America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015, pewforum.org).

3. The word gospel means “good news.” The good news is that Jesus Christ has made a perfect Atonement that will redeem all mankind from the grave and reward each individual according to his or her works. This Atonement began with His appointment in the premortal world, continued during His mortal sojourn, and culminated with His glorious Resurrection. The biblical records of His mortal life, ministry, and sacrifice are called the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

4. Matthew 28:19.

I wrestled with the question “How can we, as members and disciples of Christ, best fulfill that great commission in our daily lives?”

Today I invite you to ponder that same question in your heart and mind.⁵

A Gift for Missionary Work

Church leaders have emphasized the clarion call “Every member a missionary!” for decades.⁶

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ — both in past times as well as in ours — have enthusiastically and joyfully shared the gospel with friends and acquaintances. Their hearts are aflame with the testimony of Jesus Christ, and they sincerely want others to experience the same joy they have found in the Savior’s gospel.

Some members of the Church seem to have a gift for this. They love being ambassadors of the gospel. They boldly and gladly serve and lead the work as member missionaries.

However, others of us are more hesitant. When missionary work is discussed in Church meetings, heads are slowly lowered until submerged behind the pew, eyes focused on the scriptures or closed in deep meditation to avoid eye contact with other members.

Why is this? Maybe we feel guilty for not doing more to share the gospel. Perhaps we feel uncertain about how to do it. Or we might feel timid about going outside our comfort zone.

I understand this.

But remember, the Lord has never required expert, flawless missionary efforts. Instead, “the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind.”⁷

5. “Verily I say unto you, my friends, I leave these sayings with you to ponder in your hearts” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:62). “Behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right” (Doctrine and Covenants 9:8).

6. President David O. McKay encouraged “every member [to be] a missionary” when he presided over the European Mission from 1922 to 1924, and he shared that same message with the Church in general conference as early as 1952 (see “‘Every Member a Missionary’ Motto Stands Firm Today,” *Church News*, Feb. 20, 2015, news.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).

If you are already happily doing missionary work, please continue, and stand as an example to others. The Lord will bless you.

If, however, you feel that you have been dragging your feet when it comes to sharing the gospel message, may I suggest five guilt-free things anyone can do to participate in the Savior's great commission to help gather Israel?

Five Simple Suggestions

First, draw close to God. The first great commandment is to love God.⁸ It is a primary reason why we are on this earth. Ask yourself, "Do I really believe in Heavenly Father?"

"Do I love and trust Him?"

The closer you draw to our Heavenly Father, the more His light and joy will shine from within you. Others will notice that there is something unique and special about you. And they will ask about it.

Second, fill your heart with love for others. This is the second great commandment.⁹ Try to truly see everyone around you as a child of God. Minister to them — regardless of whether their names appear on your ministering sister or brother list.

Laugh with them. Rejoice with them. Weep with them. Respect them. Heal, lift, and strengthen them.

Strive to emulate the love of Christ and have compassion for others — even to those who are unkind to you, who mock you and wish to cause you harm. Love them and treat them as fellow children of Heavenly Father.

Third, strive to walk the path of discipleship. As your love for God and His children deepens, so does your commitment to follow Jesus Christ.

You learn about His way by feasting upon His word and heeding and applying the teachings of modern prophets and apostles. You grow in confidence and courage to follow His way as you communicate with Heavenly Father with a teachable, humble heart.

7. Doctrine and Covenants 64:34.

8. See Matthew 22:37–38.

9. See Matthew 22:39.

Walking the path of discipleship takes practice — each day, little by little, “grace for grace,”¹⁰ “line upon line.”¹¹ Sometimes two steps forward and one step back.

The important thing is that you don’t give up; keep trying to get it right. You will eventually become better, happier, and more authentic. Talking with others about your faith will become normal and natural. In fact, the gospel will be such an essential, precious part of your lives that it would feel unnatural not to talk about it with others. That may not happen immediately — it is a lifelong effort. But it will happen.

Fourth, share what is in your heart. I am not asking that you stand on a street corner with a megaphone and shout out Book of Mormon verses. What I am asking is that you always look for opportunities to bring up your faith in natural and normal ways with people — both in person as well as online. I am asking that you “stand as witnesses”¹² of the power of the gospel at all times — and when necessary, use words.¹³

Because “the gospel of Christ ... is the power of God unto salvation,” you can be confident, courageous, and humble as you share it.¹⁴ Confidence, courage, and humility may seem like contradictory attributes, but they are not. They reflect the Savior’s invitation not to hide gospel values and principles under a bushel but to let your light shine, that your good works may glorify your Father in Heaven.¹⁵

There are many normal and natural ways to do this, from daily acts of kindness to personal testimonials on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter to simple conversations with people you meet. This year we are learning from the New Testament in our homes and in Sunday School. What a marvelous opportunity to invite friends and neighbors to church and your homes to learn about the Savior with you. Share with them the Gospel Library app, where they can find *Come, Follow Me*. If you know young people and their families, give them the *For the Strength of Youth*

10. Doctrine and Covenants 93:12.

11. Isaiah 28:10.

12. Mosiah 18:9.

13. This thought is often attributed to

Saint Francis of Assisi; see also John 10:36–38.

14. Romans 1:16.

15. See Matthew 5:15–16.

booklet and invite them to come and see how our young people strive to live by those principles.

If someone asks about your weekend, don't hesitate to talk about what you experienced at church. Tell about the little children who stood in front of a congregation and sang with eagerness how they are trying to be like Jesus. Talk about the group of youth who spent time helping the elderly in rest homes to compile personal histories. Talk about the recent change in our Sunday meeting schedule and how it blesses your family. Or explain why we emphasize that this is the Church of Jesus Christ and that we are Latter-day Saints, just as the members of the ancient Church were also called Saints.

In whatever ways seem natural and normal to you, share with people why Jesus Christ and His Church are important to you. Invite them to "*come and see*."¹⁶ Then encourage them to *come and help*. There are numerous opportunities for people to help in our Church.

Pray not only for the missionaries to find the elect. Pray daily with all your heart that you will find those who will *come and see*, *come and help*, and *come and stay*. Keep the full-time missionaries in the loop. They are like angels, ready to help!

As you share the good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ, do so with love and patience. If we interact with people with the sole expectation that they soon will don a white jumpsuit and ask for directions to the nearest baptismal font, we're doing it wrong.

Some who come and see will, perhaps, never join the Church; some will at a later time. That is their choice. But that doesn't change our love for them. And it doesn't change our enthusiastic efforts to continue inviting individuals and families to come and see, come and help, and come and stay.

Fifth, trust the Lord to work His miracles. Understand that it's not your job to convert people. That is the role of the Holy Ghost. Your role is to share what is in your heart and live consistent with your beliefs.

16. John 1:46; emphasis added.

So, don't be discouraged if someone does not accept the gospel message immediately. It is not a personal failure.

That is between the individual and Heavenly Father.

Yours is to love God and love your neighbors, His children.

Believe, love, do.

Follow this path, and God will work miracles through you to bless His precious children.

These five suggestions will help you to do what disciples of Jesus Christ have done since ancient times. His gospel and His Church are an important part of your life and of who you are and what you do. Therefore, invite others to *come and see* and *come and help*, and God will do His saving work, and they will *come and stay*.

But What If It's Hard?

"But," you might ask, "what if I do all this and people react poorly? What if they are critical about the Church? What if they unfriend me?"

Yes, that may happen. Since ancient times, disciples of Jesus Christ have often been persecuted.¹⁷ The Apostle Peter said, "Rejoice ... as you share Christ's sufferings."¹⁸ The early Saints rejoiced "that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name."¹⁹

Remember, the Lord works in mysterious ways. It may be that by your Christlike response to rejection a hardened heart could be softened.

As an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, I bless you with the *confidence* to be a living testimonial of gospel values, with the *courage* to always be recognized as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, with the *humility* to assist in His work as an expression of your love for Heavenly Father and His children.

17. See John 15:18.

18. 1 Peter 4:13, English Standard Version; see also verses 1–19 for more about

how followers of Christ should view suffering for the gospel's sake.

19. Acts 5:41.

My dear friends, you will rejoice in knowing that you are a significant part in the long-foretold gathering of Israel, preparing for Christ's coming in "power and great glory; with all the holy angels."²⁰

Heavenly Father knows you. The Lord loves you. God will bless you. This work is ordained of Him. You can do this. We can all do this together.

I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

20. Doctrine and Covenants 45:44.

Just as He Did

By Bishop W. Christopher Waddell
Second Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric

*As we seek to minister just as He did, we
will be provided opportunities to forget self
and lift others.*



APPROXIMATELY 18 MONTHS ago, in the fall of 2017, my 64-year-old brother Mike informed me that he had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. He also told me that he had received a priesthood blessing from his home teacher and that he had met with his bishop. He later texted me a picture of the Oakland California Temple taken from the hospital where he was receiving treatment, with the caption “Look what I can see from my hospital room.”¹

I was as surprised by his comments about home teachers, priesthood blessings, bishops, and temples as I was about the cancer. You see, Mike, a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood, hadn’t regularly attended church for close to 50 years.

As a family, we were almost as intrigued with his spiritual progress as we were with his progress in fighting the cancer, largely because of his now frequent questions about the Book of Mormon, the sealing power, and life after death. As the months passed and the cancer spread, a need for additional and more specialized treatment eventually brought Mike to Utah and the Huntsman Cancer Institute.

Shortly after his arrival, Mike was visited by John Holbrook, the ward mission leader of the ward that served the care facility where he was now living. John commented that “it was obvious to me that Mike was a son of God” and that they quickly

1. Personal conversation.

developed a bond and a friendship, which led to John becoming Mike's de facto ministering brother. There was an immediate invitation to have the missionaries visit, which my brother politely declined, but a month into their friendship, John asked again, explaining to Mike, "I think you'd enjoy hearing the gospel message."² This time the invitation was accepted, leading to meetings with the missionaries, as well as visits with Bishop Jon Sharp, whose conversations eventually led to Mike receiving his patriarchal blessing, 57 years after his baptism.

In early December of last year, following months of procedures, Mike decided to stop the cancer treatments, which were causing severe side effects, and to just let nature take its course. We were informed by his doctor that Mike had approximately three months to live. In the meantime, the gospel questions continued — as did the visits and support of his local priesthood leaders. On our visits with Mike, we often saw an open copy of the Book of Mormon on the bedstand as we discussed the Restoration of the gospel, priesthood keys, temple ordinances, and the eternal nature of man.

By mid-December, with his patriarchal blessing in hand, Mike actually appeared to be gaining strength, and his prognosis of at least another three months seemed likely. We even made plans for him to join us for Christmas, for New Year's, and beyond. On December 16, I received an unexpected call from Bishop Sharp, who informed me that he and the stake president had interviewed Mike, had found him worthy to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood, and asked when I would be available to participate. The ordinance was scheduled for that Friday, December 21.

When the day arrived, my wife, Carol, and I arrived at the care facility and were immediately met in the hallway near his room and informed that Mike had no pulse. We entered the room to find the patriarch, his bishop, and his stake president already waiting — and then Mike opened his eyes. He recognized me and acknowledged that he could hear me and was ready to receive the priesthood. Fifty years after Mike had been ordained

2. Conversation with John Holbrook.

a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood, I had the privilege, assisted by his local leaders, to confer the Melchizedek Priesthood and ordain my brother to the office of elder. Five hours later, Mike passed away, crossing the veil to meet our parents as a holder of the Melchizedek Priesthood.

Just one year ago, a call was extended by President Russell M. Nelson for each of us to care for our brothers and sisters in a “higher, holier way.”³ Speaking of the Savior, President Nelson taught that “because it is His Church, we as His servants will minister to the one, just as He did. We will minister in His name, with His power and authority, and with His loving-kindness.”⁴

In response to that invitation from a prophet of God, remarkable efforts to minister to the one are taking place all over the world, in both coordinated efforts, as members faithfully fulfill their ministering assignments, as well as in what I’ll call “impromptu” ministering, as so many demonstrate Christlike love in response to unexpected opportunities. In our own family, we witnessed, up close, this type of ministering.

John, who was Mike’s friend, ministering brother, and a former mission president, used to tell his missionaries that “if someone is on a list that says ‘not interested,’ don’t give up. People change.” He then told us, “Mike changed mightily.”⁵ John was first a friend, providing frequent encouragement and support — but his ministering didn’t stop at friendly visits. John knew that a minister is more than a friend and that friendship is magnified as we minister.

It isn’t necessary for someone to be suffering, like my brother, from a life-threatening disease in order to be in need of ministering service. Those needs come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and conditions. A single parent; a less-active couple; a struggling teen; an overwhelmed mother; a trial of faith; or financial, health, or marriage issues — the list is almost endless. However, like Mike, no one is too far gone, and it’s never too late for the Savior’s loving reach.

3. Russell M. Nelson, “Opening Remarks,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 6.

the Power and Authority of God,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2018, 69.

4. Russell M. Nelson, “Ministering with

5. Conversation with John Holbrook.

We are taught on the ministering website of the Church that “while there are many purposes of ministering, our efforts should be guided by the desire to help others achieve a deeper individual conversion and become more like the Savior.”⁶ Elder Neil L. Andersen said it this way:

“A person with a good heart can help someone fix a tire, take a roommate to the doctor, have lunch with someone who is sad, or smile and say hello to brighten a day.

“But a follower of the first commandment will naturally add to these important acts of service.”⁷

In modeling our ministering after Jesus Christ, it is important to remember that His efforts to love, lift, serve, and bless had a higher goal than meeting the immediate need. He clearly knew of their day-to-day needs and had compassion on their current suffering as He healed, fed, forgave, and taught. But He wanted to do more than take care of today. He wanted those around Him to follow Him, to know Him, and to reach their divine potential.⁸

As we seek to minister just as He did,⁹ we will be provided opportunities to forget self and lift others. These opportunities may often be inconvenient and test our desire to become more like the Master, whose greatest service of all, His infinite Atonement, was anything but convenient. In Matthew chapter 25, we are reminded how the Lord feels about us, when, like Him, we are sensitive to the struggles, trials, and challenges faced by so many but that can often be overlooked:

“Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

“For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in. ...

“Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

6. “Ministering Principles: The Purpose That Will Change Our Ministering,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Jan. 2019, 8; see also ministering.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
7. Neil L. Andersen, “A Holier Approach to Ministering” (Brigham Young

University devotional, Apr. 10, 2018), 3, speeches.byu.edu.

8. See “The Purpose That Will Change Our Ministering,” 8–10.

9. See 3 Nephi 17:9–10, 20–21.

10. Matthew 25:34–35, 37–38, 40.

“When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? ...

“And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”¹⁰

Whether we serve as ministering brothers or sisters, or simply when we are made aware of someone in need, we are encouraged to seek the guidance and direction of the Spirit — and then to act. We may wonder how best to serve, but the Lord knows, and through His Spirit we will be directed in our efforts. Like Nephi, who “was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which [he] should do,”¹¹ we will also be led by the Spirit as we strive to become instruments in the Lord’s hands to bless His children. As we seek the guidance of the Spirit and trust the Lord, we will be placed in situations and circumstances where we can act and bless — in other words, minister.

There may be other times when we recognize a need but feel inadequate to respond, assuming that what we have to offer is insufficient. To do just as He did,¹² however, is to minister by giving what we are capable of giving and to trust that the Lord will magnify our efforts to bless our “fellow travelers on this mortal journey.”¹³ For some, it may be giving the gift of time and talents; for others, it may be a kind word or a strong back. Although we may feel that our efforts are inadequate, President Dallin H. Oaks shared an important principle regarding “small and simple.” He taught that small and simple acts are powerful because they invite “the companionship of the Holy Ghost,”¹⁴ a companion who blesses both the giver and the receiver.

Knowing that he would soon die, my brother Mike commented, “It’s amazing how pancreatic cancer can make you focus on what’s most important.”¹⁵ Thanks to wonderful men and women who saw a need, did not judge, and ministered like the Savior, it wasn’t too late for Mike. For some, change may come sooner; for others, perhaps beyond the veil. However, we

11. 1 Nephi 4:6.

12. See 3 Nephi 17:9–10, 20–21.

13. Thomas S. Monson, “Love — the Essence of the Gospel,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2014, 91.

14. Dallin H. Oaks, “Small and Simple Things,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2018, 90.

15. Personal conversation.

must remember that it is never too late and no one has ever wandered so far from the path that he or she is beyond the reach of the infinite Atonement of Jesus Christ, which is limitless in its duration and scope.

In last October's general conference, Elder Dale G. Renlund taught that "no matter how long we have been off the path ..., the moment we decide to change, God helps us return."¹⁶ That decision to change, however, is often the result of an invitation such as "I think you'd enjoy hearing the gospel message." Just as it is never too late for the Savior, it is never too soon for us to extend an invitation.

This Easter season provides us, once again, a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the great atoning sacrifice of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and what He did for each of us at such a tremendous cost — a cost that He Himself declared "caused [Him], the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain." "Nevertheless," He states, "I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men."¹⁷

I testify that because He "finished," there is always hope. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

16. Dale G. Renlund, "Choose You This Day," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 106.

17. Doctrine and Covenants 19:18–19.

A Home Where the Spirit of the Lord Dwells

By President Henry B. Eyring
Second Counselor in the First Presidency



You will find some of your greatest joys in your efforts to make your home a place of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and a place that is permeated with love.

MY DEAR BROTHERS and sisters, I am grateful to have been invited to speak to you in this 189th Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. On this date in 1830, Joseph Smith organized the Church under the direction of the Lord. It was done in the Whitmer family home near Fayette, New York. There were six members and about 50 other interested people there that day.

Although I don't know what the Prophet Joseph said or how he looked when he stood before that little group, I know what those people with faith in Jesus Christ felt. They felt the Holy Ghost, and they felt that they were in a holy place. They surely felt that they were united as one.

That miraculous feeling is what we all want in our homes. It is a feeling that comes from being, as Paul described, "spiritually minded."¹

My purpose today is to teach what I know of how we can qualify for that feeling more often and invite it to last longer in our families. As you know from experience, that is not easy to do.

1. Romans 8:6.

Contention, pride, and sin have to be kept at bay. The pure love of Christ must come into the hearts of those in our family.

Adam and Eve, Lehi and Sariah, and other parents we know from scripture found that to be a hard challenge. Yet there are encouraging examples of sustained felicity in families and homes to reassure us. And those examples let us see the way it can happen for us and our families. You remember the account from 4 Nephi:

“And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people.

“And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God.

“There were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God.

“And how blessed were they! For the Lord did bless them in all their doings; yea, even they were blessed and prospered until an hundred and ten years had passed away; and the first generation from Christ had passed away, and there was no contention in all the land.”²

As you know, that happy time did not endure forever. The account in 4 Nephi describes the eventual symptoms of spiritual decline among a group of good people. It is a pattern that has appeared over the ages in entire peoples, in congregations, and, most sadly, in families. By studying that pattern, we can see how we might protect and even increase the feelings of love in our family.

Here is the pattern of decline that appeared after 200 years of living in the perfect peace the gospel brings:

- Pride crept in.
- The people stopped sharing what they had with each other.

2. 4 Nephi 1:15–18.

- They began to see themselves in classes above or below each other.
- They began to diminish in their faith in Jesus Christ.
- They began to hate.
- They began to commit all kinds of sin.

Wise parents will be alert enough to notice those symptoms when they appear among their family members. They will, of course, be concerned. But they will know that the underlying cause is the influence of Satan trying to lead good people down a path to sin and thus to lose the influence of the Holy Ghost. So the wise parent will see that opportunity lies in leading each child, and themselves, to accept more fully the Lord's invitation to come unto Him.

You could have limited success by calling a child to repent, for instance, of pride. You might try persuading children to share what they have more generously. You could ask them to stop feeling they are better than someone else in the family. But then you come to the symptom I described earlier as "They began to diminish in their faith in Jesus Christ."

There is the key to leading your family to rise to that spiritual place you want for them — and for you to be there with them. As you help them grow in faith that Jesus Christ is their loving Redeemer, they will feel a desire to repent. As they do, humility will begin to replace pride. As they begin to feel what the Lord has given them, they will want to share more generously. Rivalry for prominence or recognition will diminish. Hate will be driven out by love. And finally, like it did for the people converted by King Benjamin, the desire to do good will fortify them against temptation to sin. King Benjamin's people testified that they had "no more disposition to do evil."³

So building faith in Jesus Christ is the beginning of reversing spiritual decline in your family and in your home. That faith is more likely to bring repentance than your preaching against each symptom of spiritual decline.

3. Mosiah 5:2.

You will best lead by example. Family members and others must see you growing in your own faith in Jesus Christ and in His gospel. You have recently been provided great help. Parents in the Church have been blessed with an inspired curriculum for families and individuals. As you use it, you will build your faith and the faith of your children in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Growing in Faith

Your faith in the Savior has grown as you followed President Russell M. Nelson's suggestion to reread the Book of Mormon. You marked passages and words that referred to the Savior. Your faith in Jesus Christ grew. But like a new plant, such faith in Jesus Christ will wither unless you find continued resolve to ponder and pray to increase it.

Your example of growing in faith may not be followed by all members of your family now. But take heart from the experience of Alma the Younger. In his painful need for repentance and forgiveness, he remembered his father's faith in Jesus Christ. Your children may remember your faith in the Savior at a moment when they desperately need repentance. Alma said of such a moment:

"And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment, while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.

"Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.

"And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more."⁴

Praying with Love

In addition to your example of growing in faith, your praying as a family can play a crucial part in making home a sacred

4. Alma 36:17–19.

place. One person is usually chosen as voice to pray for the family. When the prayer is clearly to God in behalf of the people kneeling and listening, faith grows in all of them. They can feel expressions of love for Heavenly Father and for the Savior. And when the person who prays mentions those who are kneeling in that circle who are in need, all can feel love for them and for each member of the family.

Even when family members are not living in the home, prayer can build bonds of love. Prayer in the family can reach across the world. More than once I have learned that a family member far away was praying at the same moment for the same thing as I was. For me, the old saying “The family that prays together stays together” could be expanded to “The family that prays together is together, even when they are far apart.”

Teaching Early Repentance

Because none of us is perfect and feelings are easily hurt, families can become sacred sanctuaries only as we repent early and sincerely. Parents can set an example. Harsh words or unkind thoughts can be repented of quickly and sincerely. A simple “I am sorry” can heal wounds and invite both forgiveness and love.

The Prophet Joseph Smith was a model for us as he dealt with vicious attacks, with traitors, and even with disagreements in his family. He forgave quickly, even though he knew the attacker might attack again. He asked for forgiveness, and he gave it freely.⁵

Cultivating the Missionary Spirit

The sons of Mosiah were determined to offer the gospel to everyone. This desire came from their personal experience with repentance. They could not bear the thought of any person suffering the effects of sin as they had. So they faced years of rejection, hardship, and danger to offer the gospel of Jesus Christ to their enemies. In the process, they found joy in the many who repented and experienced the joy of forgiveness through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

5. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 391–98.

Our family members will grow in their desire to share the gospel as they feel the joy of forgiveness. That can come even as they renew covenants when they partake of the sacrament. The missionary spirit will grow in our homes as children and parents feel the joy of forgiveness in the sacrament service. By their example of reverence, both parents and children can help each other feel that joy. That joy can go far in turning our homes into missionary training centers. All might not serve missions, but all will feel the desire to share the gospel, which has brought them to feel forgiveness and peace. And whether currently serving full-time or not, all can feel joy in offering the gospel to others.

Visiting the Temple

For both parents and children, the temple is the best opportunity to gain a feeling for and a love of heavenly places. That is especially true when the children are young. Children are born with the Light of Christ. Even a baby can feel that a temple is sacred. Because parents love their little children, the temple represents for them the hope that they can have their children to love in their eternal family — forever.

Some of you have photographs of temples in your homes. As temples are being added across the earth, it is possible for many parents to visit temple grounds with their families. A few may even be able to attend open houses when temples are built. Parents can ask children how they felt to be near or in a temple.

Every parent can bear testimony of what a temple has meant to him or her. President Ezra Taft Benson, who loved temples, spoke often of watching his mother carefully press her temple clothing.⁶ He spoke of his memory as a boy watching his family as they left his home to attend the temple.

When he was the President of the Church, he attended the temple the same day each week. He always did the temple work for an ancestor. It came largely from the example of his parents.

6. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Ezra Taft Benson* (2014), 167.

My Testimony

You will find some of your greatest joys in your efforts to make your home a place of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and a place that is permeated with love, the pure love of Christ. The Restoration of the gospel started with a humble question pondered in a humble home, and it can continue in each of our homes as we continue to establish and practice gospel principles there. This has been my hope and my deepest desire since I was a little boy. You have all had glimpses of such homes. Many of you have, with the Lord's help, created them.

Some have tried with full heart for that blessing, yet it has not been granted. My promise to you is one that a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles once made to me. I had said to him that because of choices some in our extended family had made, I doubted that we could be together in the world to come. He said, as well as I can remember, "You are worrying about the wrong problem. You just live worthy of the celestial kingdom, and the family arrangements will be more wonderful than you can imagine."

I believe that he would extend that happy hope to any of us in mortality who have done all we can to qualify ourselves and our family members for eternal life. I know that Heavenly Father's plan is a plan of happiness. I testify that His plan makes it possible for each of us who has done the best we can to be sealed in a family forever.

I know that the priesthood keys restored to Joseph Smith were passed on in an unbroken line to President Russell M. Nelson. Those keys make possible the sealing of families today. I know that Heavenly Father loves us, His spirit children, with a perfect love. I know that because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we can repent, be cleansed, and become worthy to live in loving families forever with our Heavenly Father and with His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The Sustaining of Church Officers

Presented by President Dallin H. Oaks
First Counselor in the First Presidency



I WILL NOW present the General Authorities, Area Seventies, and General Auxiliary Presidencies of the Church for sustaining vote.

It is proposed that we sustain Russell Marion Nelson as prophet, seer, and revelator and President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Dallin Harris Oaks as First Counselor in the First Presidency; and Henry Bennion Eyring as Second Counselor in the First Presidency.

Those in favor may manifest it.

Those opposed, if any, may manifest it.

It is proposed that we sustain Dallin H. Oaks as President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and M. Russell Ballard as Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Those in favor, please signify.

Any opposed may manifest it.

It is proposed that we sustain the following as members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: M. Russell Ballard, Jeffrey R. Holland, Dieter F. Uchtdorf, David A. Bednar, Quentin L. Cook, D. Todd Christofferson, Neil L. Andersen, Ronald A. Rasband, Gary E. Stevenson, Dale G. Renlund, Gerrit W. Gong, and Ulisses Soares.

Those in favor, please manifest it.

Any opposed may so indicate.

It is proposed that we sustain the counselors in the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators.

All in favor, please manifest it.

Contrary, if there be any, by the same sign.

It is proposed that we release the following from their service as Area Seventies: Elders Victorino A. Babida, L. Todd Budge, Peter M. Johnson, John A. McCune, Mark L. Pace, James R. Rasband, and Benjamin M. Z. Tai.

Those who wish to join us in expressing appreciation to these brethren for their dedicated service may do so with the uplifted hand.

It is proposed that we release with heartfelt gratitude Brother Tad R. Callister, Devin G. Durrant, and Brian K. Ashton as the Sunday School General Presidency.

All who wish to join us in expressing appreciation to these brethren for their remarkable service, please manifest it.

It is proposed that we sustain the following as General Authority Seventies: Rubén V. Alliaud, Jorge M. Alvarado, Hans T. Boom, L. Todd Budge, Ricardo P. Giménez, Peter M. Johnson, John A. McCune, James R. Rasband, Benjamin M. Z. Tai, and Alan R. Walker.

All in favor, please manifest it.

Those opposed, by the same sign.

It is proposed that we sustain the following as Area Seventies: Solomon I. Aliche, Guillermo A. Alvarez, Daren R. Barney, Julius F. Barrientos, James H. Bekker, Kevin G. Brown, Mark S. Bryce, A. Marcos Cabral, Dunstan G. B. T. Chadambuka, Alan C. K. Cheung, Christian C. Chigbundu, Paul N. Clayton, Karim Del Valle, Hiroyuki Domon, Mernard P. Donato, Mark D. Eddy, Zachary F. Evans, Henry J. Eyring, Sapele Fa'alogo Jr., David L. Frischknecht, John J. Gallego, Efraín R. García, Robert Gordon, Mark A. Gottfredson, Thomas Hänni, Michael J. Hess, Glenn M. Holmes, Richard S. Hutchins, Tito Ibañez, Akinori Ito, Jeremy R. Jaggi, Kelly R. Johnson, Christopher Hyunsu Kim, H. Moroni Klein, 'Inoke F. Kupu, Stephen Chee Kong Lai, Victor D. Lattaro, Tarmo Lepp, Itzcoatl Lozano, Kevin J. Lythgoe, Edgar P. Montes, S. Ephraim Msane, Luiz C. D. Queiroz, Ifanomezana Rasolondraibe, Eduardo D. Resek, Tomás G. Román, Ramon E. Sarmiento, Jonathan S. Schmitt, Vai Sikahema, Denelson Silva, Luis Spina, Carlos G. Süffert, Voi R. Taeoalii, Sergio R. Vargas, and Markus Zarse.

All in favor, please manifest it.

Those opposed, if any.

It is proposed that we sustain Mark L. Pace to serve as Sunday School General President, with Milton da Rocha Camargo as First Counselor and Jan Eric Newman as Second Counselor.

Those in favor may manifest it.

Any opposed may so signify.

It is proposed that we sustain the other General Authorities, Area Seventies, and General Auxiliary Presidencies as presently constituted.

All in favor, please manifest it.

Those opposed, if any.

President Nelson, the voting has been noted. We invite those who may have opposed any of the proposals to contact their stake presidents.

Brothers and sisters, we thank you for your continued faith and prayers in behalf of the leaders of the Church.

We now invite the new General Authority Seventies and the new Sunday School General Presidency to take their seats on the rostrum.

Church Auditing Department Report, 2018

Presented by Kevin R. Jergensen
Managing Director, Church Auditing Department



TO THE FIRST Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of
Latter-day Saints

Dear Brethren: Directed by revelation, as recorded in section 120 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Council on the Disposition of the Tithes — composed of the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and the Presiding Bishopric — authorizes the expenditure of Church funds. Church entities disburse funds in accordance with approved budgets, policies, and procedures.

Church Auditing, which consists of credentialed professionals and is independent of all other Church departments, has responsibility to perform audits for the purpose of providing reasonable assurance regarding contributions received, expenditures made, and safeguarding of Church assets.

Based upon audits performed, Church Auditing is of the opinion that, in all material respects, contributions received, expenditures made, and assets of the Church for the year 2018 have been recorded and administered in accordance with approved Church budgets, policies, and accounting practices. The Church follows the practices taught to its members of living within a budget, avoiding debt, and saving against a time of need.

Respectfully submitted,
Church Auditing Department
Kevin R. Jergensen
Managing Director

The True, Pure, and Simple Gospel of Jesus Christ

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



Loving God and loving our neighbors is the doctrinal foundation of ministering; home-centered, Church-supported learning; Sabbath-day spiritual worship; and the work of salvation.

MY BROTHERS AND sisters, it's difficult for me to believe that it was 71 years ago, in 1948, that I was a missionary in England and 44 years ago that my wife, Barbara, and I took our family to Canada when I was the president of the Canada Toronto Mission. While serving there in April 1976, I was called to the First Quorum of the Seventy, and unexpectedly in 1985, I was called to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Unlike my previous callings, which included future releases, my release from my calling to the Twelve is not the best option right now; however, I pray that day will come only after I have finished all the Lord has called me to do.

In thinking about my last 43 years of service as a General Authority and the privilege I have had to minister to Heavenly Father's children, I have come to realize more fully that He wants all of His children to find peace, joy, and happiness in their lives.

The prophet Lehi taught, "Men [and women] are, that they might have joy."¹ There are many reasons why peace, joy, and

1. 2 Nephi 2:25.

happiness may elude us in this life, including poverty, war, natural disasters, and unexpected setbacks in employment, health, and family relationships.

But even though we cannot control those external forces that impact our lives here on earth, as we strive to become faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, we can find peace, joy, and happiness despite the worldly troubles that swirl around us.

One of my children once said, “Dad, I wonder if I will ever be able to make it.” I responded, “All Heavenly Father asks of us is to do the very best we can each day.” Brothers and sisters, do the best you can do day after day, and before you know it, you will come to realize that your Heavenly Father knows you and that He loves you. And when you know that — really know it — your life will have real purpose and meaning and you will be filled with joy and peace.

As the Light of the World, the Savior said,

“Whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.”²

“Jesus Christ is the name which is given of the Father, and there is none other name given whereby [we] can be saved;

“Wherefore, all men [and women] must take upon them the name which is given of the Father.”³

The scriptures teach us that Satan desires to lead people into darkness. His every effort is to shut out the light and truth of Jesus Christ and His gospel. As Lehi taught his children, the devil “seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.”⁴ If Heavenly Father’s “work and ... glory” is “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of [men and women],”⁵ Lucifer’s “work” is to bring to pass the misery and endless woe of God’s children. Sin and transgression dim the Light of Christ in our lives. That is why our quest is to bask in the Light of Christ, which brings peace, joy, and happiness.

In the last 18 months, the Lord has inspired His prophet and the Apostles to implement a number of wonderful adjustments.

2. John 12:46.

3. Doctrine and Covenants 18:23–24.

4. 2 Nephi 2:27.

5. Moses 1:39.

However, I worry that the spiritual purposes of these adjustments might become lost in the excitement about the changes themselves.

Joseph F. Smith said: “The true, pure, simple gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored. We are responsible for maintaining it upon the earth.”⁶ He added that the true, pure, and simple gospel is the “saving doctrines of Christ.”⁷

In the Articles of Faith, the Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.”⁸

The first principles of the gospel are faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end. His brother Hyrum taught: “Preach them over [and over] again: you will find that day after day new ideas and additional light concerning them will be revealed to you. You can enlarge upon them ... to comprehend them clearly. You will then be able to make them more plainly understood by those [you] teach.”⁹

The best ways for us to see the spiritual purposes of the Church are to live the true, pure, and simple teachings of Christ and also to apply the Savior’s two great commandments: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart. ... Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”¹⁰

Obedience to those two commandments provides a way to experience more peace and joy. When we love and serve the Lord and love and serve our neighbors, we will naturally feel more happiness that comes to us in no better way.

Loving God and loving our neighbors is the doctrinal foundation of ministering; home-centered, Church-supported learning; Sabbath-day spiritual worship; and the work of salvation on both sides of the veil supported in the Relief Societies and the elders quorums. All of these things are based on the divine

6. Joseph F. Smith, “Principle, Not Popularity,” *Improvement Era*, July 1906, 732.

7. Joseph F. Smith, “Principle, Not Popularity,” 732.

8. Articles of Faith 1:3.

9. Hyrum Smith, in “What Is My Purpose

as a Missionary?” *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service*, rev. ed. (2019), 6.

10. Doctrine and Covenants 59:5–6; see also Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:36–40.

commandments to love God and to love our neighbors. Can there be anything more basic, more fundamental, and more simple than that?

Living the true, pure, and simple gospel plan will allow us more time to visit the widows, widowers, orphans, lonely, sick, and poor. We will find peace, joy, and happiness in our life when serving the Lord and our neighbors.

The Sabbath-day adjustments that emphasize home-centered, Church-supported gospel learning and studying are an opportunity to renew our spirit and our devotion to God within the walls of our homes. What could possibly be more simple, basic, and profound? Brothers and sisters, can you see that learning and teaching the gospel in our families is an important way to find joy and happiness in our lives?

Speaking of the Sabbath, the Savior said, “For verily this is a day appointed unto you to rest from your labors, and to pay thy devotions unto the Most High.”¹¹ He added, “That thy joy may be full ... [through] rejoicing and prayer ... ye [should] do these things with thanksgiving, with cheerful hearts and countenances ... [and] with a glad heart and a cheerful countenance.”¹²

Please note some of the key words in this revelation: *joy, rejoicing, thanksgiving, cheerful hearts, glad heart, and a cheerful countenance*. It sounds to me like Sabbath-day observance should bring smiles to our faces.

As we minister in a higher and holier way, please consider how essential it is that we greet everyone who comes to our Church meetings, especially new members and visitors. We should all enjoy singing the hymns and listening carefully to the words of the sacrament prayers with an open heart and mind.

Testimonies of faith in our fast and testimony meetings are led by a member of the bishopric, who shares a brief testimony focused on the plan of happiness and the true, pure, and simple gospel of Christ. All others should follow that example. We need

11. Doctrine and Covenants 59:10.

12. Doctrine and Covenants 59:13–15.

to remember that there are other appropriate places to tell stories or share travel adventures. As we keep our testimonies simple and focused on the gospel of Christ, He will provide spiritual renewal as we share our testimonies with one another.

Effective ministering is best viewed through the focused lens of loving God and loving our neighbors. Simply stated, we minister because we love our Heavenly Father and His children. Our ministering efforts will be more successful if we keep our ministering simple. The most joy comes from the simple things of life, so we need to be careful not to think that more needs to be added to any of the adjustments we have received to build faith and strong testimonies in the hearts of God's children.

Let's not complicate things with additional meetings, expectations, or requirements. Keep it simple. It is in that simplicity that you will find the peace, joy, and happiness I have been talking about.

For years the leadership purposes of the Church, as stated in *Handbook 2*, are outcomes that are clear and simple, from which I quote:

"Leaders encourage every member to receive all essential priesthood ordinances, keep the associated covenants, and qualify for exaltation and eternal life...."

"Adults: *Encourage each adult to be worthy to receive the ordinances of the temple. Teach all adults to identify their ancestors and perform vicarious temple ordinances for them.*

"Youth: *Help prepare each young man to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood, to receive the ordinances of the temple, and to be worthy to serve a full-time mission. Help prepare each young woman to be worthy to make and keep sacred covenants and receive the ordinances of the temple. Strengthen youth through participation in meaningful activities.*

"All Members: *Help priesthood and auxiliary leaders, ward councils, ward and full-time missionaries, and members work cooperatively*

13. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 3.4.

in a balanced effort to rescue individuals, strengthen families and Church units, increase priesthood activity, and gather Israel through conversion, retention, and activation. Teach members to provide for themselves and their families and to assist the poor and needy in the Lord's way.”¹³

My service in the Church has blessed me with many remarkable and special spiritual experiences. I am a witness that the Lord directs His Church to accomplish His purposes. I have received divine guidance far beyond my capacity. The joy of gospel living for me has been centered on the true, pure, and simple doctrine and gospel of Jesus Christ.

I have served under the keys and directions of six prophets and Church Presidents, from Spencer W. Kimball to Russell M. Nelson. I testify that each one of them was and is God's chosen prophet. They have taught us essential principles about the Church and the gospel and doctrine of Christ. President Nelson is carrying the Lord's work forward at a breathtaking pace. I say “breathtaking” because he's the only one of the Apostles who is older than me, and I am having a difficult time keeping up with him! I am a witness that the priesthood keys and the mantle of a prophet of God are upon him. President Nelson teaches the true, pure, and simple gospel of Jesus Christ. I bear my testimony that Jesus is the Christ and this is His Church — of which I testify humbly in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Seeking Knowledge by the Spirit

By Elder Mathias Held
Of the Seventy



We should learn to discern the truth not only through our rational minds but also through the very still and small voice of the Spirit.

DEAR BROTHERS AND sisters, the Lord has repeatedly told us to “seek learning even by study and also by faith.”¹ We can receive light and understanding not only through the logical reasoning of our minds but also through the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

This additional source of knowledge has not always been part of my life.

My dear wife, Irene, and I joined the Church 31 years ago when we were newly married. We had both grown up in Colombia, but a few months after our marriage, my career took us to live in Germany. We were very young and had great hopes and expectations; it was an especially exciting and happy time for us.

While I was concentrated on my career, Irene was feeling that we would receive some kind of message from heaven, without knowing how or when. So she started letting into our home all kinds of door-to-door salespeople with encyclopedias, vacuum cleaners, cookbooks, kitchen appliances, and so on, always waiting for that unique message.

1. Doctrine and Covenants 109:7; see also Doctrine and Covenants 88:118.

One evening she told me that two young men in dark suits had knocked on our door and that she had felt a very clear and distinct impression to let them in. They had said that they wanted to talk to her about God but would come back again when I was also at home. Could this be the expected message?

They began to visit us, and with their guidance, we read in the scriptures and came to understand the crucial importance of Jesus Christ as our Savior and Redeemer. We soon regretted that we had been baptized as little babies, which had not been a conscious covenant. However, being baptized again would also mean becoming members of this new Church, so first we really needed to understand everything about it.

But how could we know if what the missionaries were telling us about the Book of Mormon, about Joseph Smith, and about the plan of salvation was actually all true? Well, we had understood from the words of the Lord that we could “know them by their fruits.”² So, in a very systematic manner, we started examining the Church by looking for those fruits with the eyes of our very rational minds. What did we see? Well, we saw:

- Friendly and happy people and wonderful families who understood that we are meant to feel joy in this life and not just suffering and misery.
- A church that does not have a paid clergy but one in which members themselves accept assignments and responsibilities.
- A church where Jesus Christ and families are at the center of everything, where members fast once a month and donate to help the poor and needy, where healthy habits are promoted, teaching us to abstain from harmful substances.

In addition:

- We liked the emphasis on personal growth, on education, on hard work and self-reliance.
- We learned about the remarkable humanitarian program.

2. 3 Nephi 14:16.

- And we were impressed by the general conferences, with the wonderful music and the profound spiritual principles shared there.

Seeing all this, we could find no fault in the Church. On the contrary, we liked everything we saw very much. However, we still could not decide to be baptized because we wanted to know everything before doing so.

But, even in our indecision, the Lord was patiently preparing us, He was molding us, and He was helping us to discover that we should learn to discern the truth not only through our rational minds but also through the very still and small voice of the Spirit, which speaks especially to our hearts.

That voice and the resulting feeling came one evening after 10 months of learning the gospel, when we read in Mosiah 18, “As ye are desirous to ... bear one another’s burdens, ... and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, ... if this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord?”³

That passage from the Book of Mormon entered our hearts and souls, and we suddenly felt and knew that there was really no reason not to be baptized. We realized that the desires mentioned in these verses were also the wishes of our hearts and that those things were what really mattered. They were more important than understanding everything because we already knew enough. We had always relied on the guiding hand of a loving Heavenly Father and were confident that He would continue to guide us.

So, that same day, we set up a date for our baptism, and soon we were baptized, finally!

What did we learn from that experience?

First, we learned that we can fully trust in a loving Heavenly Father, who is constantly trying to help us become the person He knows we can become. We confirmed the profound truth of His words when He said, “I will give unto the children of men

3. Mosiah 18:8–10.

line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, ... for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more.”⁴

And second, we learned that, in addition to our rational minds, another dimension to gaining knowledge can give us guidance and understanding. It is the still and soft voice of His Holy Spirit speaking to our hearts and also to our minds.

I like to compare this principle with our visual capacity. Our Father in Heaven has given us not only one but two physical eyes. We can see adequately with only one eye, but the second eye provides us with another perspective. When both perspectives are put together in our brains, they produce a three-dimensional image of our surroundings.

Likewise, we have been given two sources of information, through our physical and spiritual capacities. Our mind produces one perception through our physical senses and through our reasoning. But through the gift of the Holy Ghost, the Father has also provided us with a second perspective, which is really the most important and true one because it comes directly from Him. But since the whisperings of the Spirit are often so subtle, many people are not consciously aware of that additional source.

When these two perspectives are then combined in our souls, one complete picture shows the reality of things as they truly are. In fact, through the additional perspective of the Holy Ghost, certain “realities,” as pictured exclusively through our mental understanding, can be exposed as deceiving or plainly wrong. Remember the words of Moroni: “By the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.”⁵

In my 31 years as a member of the Church, I have experienced many times that if we rely only on our rational mind and deny or neglect the spiritual understanding we can receive through the whisperings and impressions of the Holy Ghost, it is as if

4. 2 Nephi 28:30.

5. Moroni 10:5.

we were going through life with only one eye. But figuratively speaking, we have actually been given two eyes. Only the combination of both views can give us the true and complete picture of all truths and of everything we experience in our lives, as well as of the whole and profound understanding of our identity and purpose as children of a living Heavenly Father.

I am reminded of what President Russell M. Nelson taught us a year ago when he said that “in coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost.”⁶

I have come to know with absolute certainty that:

- We have a loving Father in Heaven, and we all agreed to come to this earth as part of a divine plan.
- Jesus is the Christ; He lives and is my Savior and Redeemer.
- Joseph, a humble farm boy, was called and became the mighty prophet who initiated this, the dispensation of the fulness of times, with all of its keys, power, and authority of the holy priesthood of God.
- The Book of Mormon is a second witness of Jesus Christ, and families are meant to remain together forever.
- Our Lord, Jesus Christ, leads this, His restored Church, through our living prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, today.

These and many other precious truths have become spiritual building blocks of what God is helping me to become. And I look forward to the many new teachings that He still wants me — and you — to receive as we go through this wonderful life and “learn ... even by study and also by faith.”

I know these things to be true and testify of them in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

6. Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2018, 96.

The Eye of Faith

By Elder Neil L. Andersen
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

If we pick and choose what we accept in the proclamation, we cloud our eternal view, putting too much importance on our experience here and now.



SHORTLY BEFORE HIS Crucifixion, Jesus was taken before Pilate in the judgment hall. “Art thou the King of the Jews?” Pilate condescendingly asked. Jesus responded: “My kingdom is not of this world. ... I [came] into the world, that I should bear witness [of] the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.”

Pilate cynically asked, “What is truth?”¹

In today’s world, the question “What is truth?” can be painfully complex to the secular mind.

A Google search for “What is truth?” brings more than a million responses. We have more available information on our cell phones than in all the books of a brick and mortar library. We live with information and opinion overload. Enticing and alluring voices pursue us at every turn.

Caught in today’s confusion, it is no wonder that so many consign themselves to the words spoken 2,500 years ago by Protagoras to the young Socrates: “What is true for you,” he said, “is true for you, and what is true for me, is true for me.”²

1. John 18:33, 36–38.

2. William S. Sahakian and Mabel Lewis Sahakian, *Ideas of the Great Philosophers* (1966), 28.

Truth through the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ

Blessed with the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, we humbly declare that there are some things that are completely and absolutely true. These eternal truths are the same for every son and daughter of God.

The scriptures teach, “Truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come.”³ Truth looks backward and forward, expanding the perspective of our small point in time.

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”⁴ Truth shows us the way to eternal life, and it comes only through our Savior, Jesus Christ. There is no other way.

Jesus Christ teaches us how to live, and, through His Atonement and Resurrection, He offers us forgiveness from our sins and immortality beyond the veil. This is absolutely true.

He teaches us that it does not matter if we are rich or poor, prominent or unknown, sophisticated or simple. Rather, our mortal quest is to strengthen our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, to choose good over evil, and to keep His commandments. While we celebrate the innovations of science and medicine, the truths of God go far beyond these discoveries.

In opposition to the truths of eternity, there always have been counterfeits to distract God’s children from the truth. The arguments of the adversary are always the same. Listen to these, voiced 2,000 years ago:

“[You] cannot know of things [you] do not see. ... [Whatever a person does is] no crime.”

“[God is not blessing you, but] every [person] prosper[s] according to his [own] genius.”⁵

“It is not reasonable that such a being as ... Christ ... [would] be the Son of God.”⁶

“[What you believe is a foolish tradition and a] derangement of your [mind].”⁷

3. Doctrine and Covenants 93:24.

4. John 14:6.

5. Alma 30:15, 17.

6. Helaman 16:18.

7. See Alma 30:14, 23, 27.

Sounds like today, doesn't it?

With the Restoration of the gospel, God has given us the way to learn and know essential spiritual truths: we learn them through the holy scriptures, through our personal prayers and our own experiences, through the counsel of the living prophets and apostles, and through the guidance of the Holy Ghost, who can help us to “know the truth of all things.”⁸

Truth Is Spiritually Discerned

We can know the things of God as we seek them spiritually. Paul said, “The things of God knoweth no man, except he has the Spirit of God. ... [For] they are spiritually discerned.”⁹

Look at this art by Michael Murphy. From this perspective, you would hardly believe that it is an artistic rendition of a human eye. However, as you look at the dots from a different perspective, you see the beauty of the artist's creation.

Likewise, we see the spiritual truths of God through the perspective of an eye of faith. Paul said: “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”¹⁰

The scriptures, our prayers, our own experiences, modern prophets, and the gift of the Holy Ghost bring us the spiritual perspective of truth necessary for our journey here on earth.

The Proclamation through the Eye of Faith

Let's look at the proclamation on the family through the eye of faith.

President Gordon B. Hinckley introduced “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” with this statement: “With so much of sophistry that is passed off as truth, with so much of deception concerning standards and values, with so much of allurements and enticement to take on the slow stain of the world, we have felt to warn [you].”¹¹

8. Moroni 10:5.

10. 1 Corinthians 2:14.

9. Joseph Smith Translation, 1 Corinthians 2:11 (in 1 Corinthians 2:11, footnote c); 1 Corinthians 2:14.

The proclamation begins: “All human beings — male and female — are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny.”

These are eternal truths. You and I are not an accident of nature.

I love these words: “In the premortal realm, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshipped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan.”¹²

We lived before our birth. Our individual identity is stamped in us forever. In ways we don’t fully understand, our spiritual growth there in the premortal world influences who we are here.¹³ We accepted God’s plan. We knew that we would experience difficulties, pain, and sorrow upon the earth.¹⁴ We also knew that the Savior would come and that as we proved ourselves worthy, we would rise in the Resurrection, having “glory added upon [our] heads for ever and ever.”¹⁵

11. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Stand Strong against the Wiles of the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 100. President Russell M. Nelson recently explained some of the history of the proclamation, as summarized by Sheri Dew in *Insights from a Prophet’s Life: Russell M. Nelson* (2019), 208: “One day in 1994, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles spent a day in their council room in the Salt Lake Temple discussing issues surrounding the family. They considered everything from the increasingly ubiquitous nature of pornography to potential anti-family legislation of various kinds. This was not a new discussion, but that day the entire agenda revolved around this one vital topic. ‘The Twelve reviewed both doctrine and policies, considering those things that could not be changed — doctrine — and those things that possibly could be — policies. They discussed issues they saw coming, including an intensified societal push for gay marriage and transgender rights. ‘But that was not the end of what we saw,’ Elder Nelson explained. ‘We could see the efforts

of various communities to do away with all standards and limitations on sexual activity. We saw the confusion of genders. We could see it all coming.’ “This extended discussion, along with others over a period of time, led to the conclusion that the Twelve should prepare a document, perhaps even a proclamation, outlining the Church’s stand on the family to present to the First Presidency for consideration.”

12. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2017, 145.

13. President Dallin H. Oaks said: “All of the myriads of mortals who have been born on this earth chose the Father’s plan and fought for it. Many of us also made covenants with the Father concerning what we would do in mortality. In ways that have not been revealed, our actions in the spirit world influence us in mortality” (“The Great Plan of Happiness,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 72).

14. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Truth and the Plan,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 25–28.

15. Abraham 3:26.

The proclamation is direct: “We declare the means by which mortal life is created to be divinely appointed. We affirm the sanctity of life and of its importance in God’s eternal plan.”

Our Father’s plan encourages a husband and wife to bring children into the world and obligates us to speak in defense of the unborn.

Principles of the Proclamation Are Beautifully Connected

If we pick and choose what we accept in the proclamation, we cloud our eternal view, putting too much importance on our experience here and now. By prayerfully pondering the proclamation through the eye of faith, we better understand how the principles are beautifully connected, supporting one another, revealing our Father’s plan for His children.¹⁶

Should we really be surprised when the Lord’s prophets declare His will and, for some, questions remain? Of course, some reject the voice of the prophets immediately,¹⁷ but others prayerfully ponder their honest questions — questions that will be settled with patience and an eye of faith. If the proclamation had been revealed in a different century, there would still have been questions, just different questions than those of today. One purpose of prophets is to help us in resolving sincere questions.¹⁸

16. President Dallin H. Oaks has said: “Converted Latter-day Saints believe that the family proclamation, issued nearly a quarter century ago and now translated into scores of languages, is the Lord’s reemphasis of the gospel truths we need to sustain us through current challenges to the family. ... “I testify that the proclamation on the family is a statement of eternal truth, the will of the Lord for His children who seek eternal life. It has been the basis of Church teaching and practice for the last 22 years and will continue so for the future. Consider it as such, teach it, live by it, and you will be blessed as you press forward toward eternal life. ... “... I believe our attitude toward and use of the family proclamation is one of those tests for this generation. I pray for all Latter-day Saints to stand firm in that test” (“The

Plan and the Proclamation,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2017, 30–31).

17. President Russell M. Nelson has said: “There are those who label us [as] bigots, but the bigots are those who don’t allow us to feel as we feel but want us to allow them to feel as they feel. Our stand ultimately boils down to the law of chastity. The Ten Commandments are still valid. They’ve never been revoked. ... It is not our prerogative to change laws that God has decreed” (in Dew, *Insights from a Prophet’s Life*, 212).

18. “While the family is under attack across the entire world, the truths of the family proclamation will fortify you. “You wonderful youth of the noble birthright, you need to understand the far-reaching consequences of society’s current skirmish over the very definition of marriage. The

Prior to being the President of the Church, President Russell M. Nelson said: “Prophets see ahead. They see the harrowing dangers the adversary has placed or will yet place in our path. Prophets also foresee the grand possibilities and privileges awaiting those who listen with the intent to obey.”¹⁹

I testify to the truth and spiritual power of the united voice of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve.

The World Walking Away

In my lifetime, we have seen a dramatic change in the world’s beliefs about many of the principles taught in the proclamation. During my teenage and early married years, many in the world walked away from the Lord’s standard we call the law of chastity, that sexual relations are to occur only between a man and a woman who are lawfully married. In my 20s and 30s, many walked away from the sacred protection of the unborn, as abortion became more acceptable. In more recent years, many have walked away from God’s law that marriage is a sacred union between a man and a woman.²⁰

Watching many walking away from the boundaries the Lord has set reminds us of that day in Capernaum when the Savior declared His divinity and sadly “many of his disciples ... walked [away].”

The Savior then turned to the Twelve: “Will ye also go away?”

Peter answered:

“Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

present debate involves the question of whether two people of the same gender can be married. If you have a question about the position of the Church on this or any other important issue, prayerfully ponder it, and then heed the prophetic messages at this forthcoming October general conference of the Church. Those inspired addresses, plus inspiration from the Holy Ghost, will bring to your mind a fuller and truer understanding” (Russell M. Nelson, “Youth of the Noble Birthright: What Will You Choose?” [Church Educational System devotional for young adults, Sept. 6, 2013],

broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).

19. Russell M. Nelson, “Stand as True Millennials,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2016, 31; *Liahona*, Oct. 2016, 53.

20. President Nelson has said: “Civil governments are heavily influenced by social trends and secular philosophies as they write, rewrite, and enforce laws. Regardless of what civil legislation may be enacted, the doctrine of the Lord regarding marriage and morality cannot be changed. Remember: sin, even if legalized by man, is still sin in the eyes of God!” (“Decisions for Eternity,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2013, 108).

“And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.”²¹

Not All Fit Neatly inside the Proclamation

There are so many, young and old, who are loyal and true to the gospel of Jesus Christ, even though their own current experience does not fit neatly inside the family proclamation: children whose lives have been shaken by divorce; youth whose friends mock the law of chastity; divorced women and men who have been gravely wounded by the unfaithfulness of a spouse; husbands and wives who are unable to have children; women and men who are married to a spouse who does not share their faith in the restored gospel; single women and men who, for various reasons, have been unable to marry.

One friend of nearly 20 years, whom I admire greatly, is not married because of same-sex attraction. He has remained true to his temple covenants, has expanded his creative and professional talents, and has served nobly in both the Church and the community. He recently said to me, “I can sympathize with those in my situation who choose not to keep the law of chastity in the world in which we live. But didn’t Christ ask us to be ‘not of this world’? It is clear that God’s standards are different from those of the world.”

The laws of man often move outside the boundaries set by the laws of God. For those desiring to please God, faith, patience, and diligence are surely needed.²²

My wife, Kathy, and I have known a single sister, now in her mid-40s, who is gifted in her professional abilities and serves valiantly in her ward. She too has kept the laws of God. She wrote:

“I dreamed of the day I would be blessed with a husband and children. I am still waiting. At times, my situation brings feelings of being forgotten and alone, but I try to keep the focus off what I don’t have and instead on what I do have and how I can help others.”

21. John 6:66–69.

22. See Alma 32:41–43; I have always been impressed that in this great chapter on growing our faith, the virtues of faith,

patience, and diligence are mentioned together in each of the last three verses.

“Service to my extended family, in my ward, and in the temple has helped me. I am not forgotten or alone because I am part of, and we are all part of, a larger family.”

There Is One Who Understands

Some will say, “You don’t understand my situation.” I may not, but I testify that there is One who does understand.²³ There is One who knows your burdens because of His sacrifice made in the garden and on the cross. As you seek Him and keep His commandments, I promise you that He will bless you and lift the burdens too heavy to bear alone. He will give you eternal friends and opportunities to serve. More important, He will fill you with the powerful Spirit of the Holy Ghost and shine His heavenly approval upon you. No choice, no alternative that denies the companionship of the Holy Ghost or the blessings of eternity is worthy of our consideration.

I know the Savior lives. I witness that He is the source of all truth that really matters and that He will fulfill all the blessings He has promised to those who keep His commandments. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

23. See Alma 7:12; Jesus Christ suffered not only for our sins but for our infirmities as well: “He will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according

to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.” (Synonyms for infirmities would be *sickness, weakness, affliction, deficiency*.) See Doctrine and Covenants 88:6: “He descended below all things, in that he comprehended all things, that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth.”

Feasting upon the Words of Christ

By Elder Takashi Wada
Of the Seventy



Feasting upon the words of Christ can happen at any time and on any occasion if we prepare our hearts.

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER loves us. He has provided a perfect plan for us to enjoy His blessings. In this life, we are all invited to come unto Christ and receive the restored gospel of Jesus Christ through baptism, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and faithfully living the gospel. Nephi describes our commitment to be baptized as entering a “strait and narrow path,” and he reminds us to continue to “press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, ... feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end,” in order to receive all the blessings Heavenly Father has in store for us (2 Nephi 31:19–20).

Nephi further reminds us that if we will “feast upon the words of Christ,” they “will tell [us] all things [we] should do” (2 Nephi 32:3) and that we will be empowered to overcome the “fiery darts of the adversary” (1 Nephi 15:24).

What Is Feasting?

When I was young, I thought that feasting was simply having a big meal with rice, sushi, and soy sauce. I now know true feasting is more than enjoying a delicious meal. It is an experience of joy, nourishment, celebration, sharing, expressing love to families and loved ones, communicating our thanksgiving to God, and building relationships while enjoying abundant, incredibly delicious food. I believe when we feast upon the words of Christ, we ought to be thinking of

the same kind of experience. Feasting upon the scriptures is not just reading them. It should bring us real joy and build our relationship with the Savior.

This is clearly taught in the Book of Mormon. Recall Lehi's dream where he saw a tree "whose fruit [is] desirable to make one happy." This fruit represents the love of God, and as Lehi tastes the fruit, "it was ... sweet, above all that [he] ever before tasted." It "filled [his] soul with exceedingly great joy" and is something he wants to share with his family (1 Nephi 8:10–12).

When we feast, we will also likely find that the amount or kind of food we have may not matter if our hearts are filled with gratitude. Lehi's family lived on raw meat in the wilderness, but Nephi described this difficult trial, saying, "So great were the blessings of the Lord" that "our women ... were strong" and were able "to bear their journeyings without murmurings" (1 Nephi 17:1–2).

Feasting sometimes involves experimenting and tasting. Alma talks about a good seed being planted in our hearts. As we experiment on it, we will realize the seed begins "to be delicious" (see Alma 32:28–33).

Feasting upon the Words of Christ

The blessings of feasting upon the words of Christ are powerful and life changing. There are three in particular I would like to invite you to apply in your life.

First, the words of Christ can help us "increase [our] spiritual capacity to receive revelation" (Russell M. Nelson, "Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2018, 96) and safely guide us through our life. Mormon teaches that the words of Christ have "a great tendency to lead the people to do that which [is] just" and that they are more powerful than anything "the sword" can accomplish (Alma 31:5). As I have searched for God's wisdom in dealing with my own challenges, always as I have tried the "virtue of the word of God" (Alma 31:5), I have felt inspired and enabled to make wise decisions, overcome temptations, and bless my life with increased faith in Christ and love for those around me. Our prophet, Russell M. Nelson, has taught us that "in coming days,

it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost” (“Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” 96). Needed revelation will come as we try the “virtue of the word,” and that word will be more powerful than anything else we could try or imagine.

Second, when we struggle with our own identity and lack of self-esteem, the “pleasing word of God” (Jacob 2:8) in the scriptures will help us know who we really are and give us strength beyond our own. Recognizing my identity as God’s child was one of the sweetest moments I have ever experienced. In my early teenage years, I did not know anything about the teachings of the Savior. When I first read the New Testament, the words of Christ truly healed my wounded soul. I realized I was not alone and that I am a child of God. As I recognized my true identity before God, I realized my infinite potential through Christ’s Atonement.

Enos likewise shared his personal experience of the enlightenment that comes from contemplating the words of Christ. As Enos let the words that his father taught him regarding “eternal life, and the joy of the saints, [sink] deep into [his] heart,” his soul “hungered; and [he] kneeled down before [his] Maker ... in mighty prayer” (Enos 1:3–4). In that prayer he came to know the Savior and learned that we have great worth, are loved and can be forgiven of our mistakes, and are truly children of God.

Third, we can lift the lives of others through the words of Christ. Just as Enos had his own time and place where the words of Christ touched his heart, the Lord will do His part to touch the hearts of those with whom we wish to share the gospel. Many of us may have felt discouraged when we tried to invite someone to hear the gospel because our desired result did not follow. Regardless of the outcome, the Lord invites us to open our mouth and share the gospel message with others.

Two years ago, the Lord touched my dear mother’s heart, which helped her decide to receive the ordinance of baptism. I had waited for that day to take place for almost 35 years. In order for her to make that decision, many members of the Church

truly ministered to her as Christ would. One Sunday, she felt she should go to church. She followed the prompting. While she sat on the front row and waited for the sacrament service to begin, a four-year-old boy stood in front of her and looked at her. She greeted him with a smile. The little boy left her presence abruptly and walked back to his own seat, which was on the other side of the row where my mother was seated. This little boy picked up something from his seat and came back and handed my mother a hymnbook and walked back to his seat. My mother noticed a hymnbook was placed on every other chair in the chapel. She could have easily picked one up from the chair next to her. However, she was very impressed with the boy's innocent act of kindness, which he had learned in his home and at church. It was a tender moment for her. She had a strong impression that God was inviting her to come and follow the Savior. She felt she should be baptized. This little boy did not seek recognition for what he did, but he simply did his best to live the word of God and to love his neighbor. His kindness created an important change of heart in my mother.

The words of Christ will profoundly touch hearts and open the eyes of those who do not yet see Him. On the road to Emmaus, two disciples walked with Jesus. They were sad and did not comprehend that the Savior had triumphed over death. In their grief, they did not recognize that the living Christ was walking with them. Though Jesus "expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself," they still did not recognize Him as the resurrected Savior until they sat and broke bread with Him. Then did their "eyes" open. As we — or our friends, associates, and neighbors — feast and break bread with Him, our eyes of understanding will open. When the disciples at Emmaus reflected on their time with the resurrected Savior, they said that their hearts burned within them while He opened the scriptures to them (see Luke 24:27–32). This will be true for all of us.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I bear testimony that feasting upon the words of Christ can happen at any time and on any occasion if we prepare our hearts to receive them. Feasting upon the words

of Christ will bring life-sustaining revelation, reaffirm our true identity and worth before God as His child, and lead our friends unto Christ and everlasting life. Let me end by echoing the invitation of Nephi when he said: “Ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:20). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Hearing His Voice

By Elder David P. Homer
Of the Seventy

In a world with so many competing voices, our Heavenly Father has made it possible for us to hear and follow His.



EARLIER THIS MORNING, my wife's brother gave her a note that she had written to her mother many years ago. At the time, Sister Homer was just a little girl. In part, her note read, "Dear Mother, I am sorry I did not bear my testimony today — but I love you." As we went to lunch, I thought that was an interesting thing. So I sat down, and I wrote a note that said, "Dear President Nelson, I am sorry I did not give my talk today — but I love you." Somehow that did not feel right. So here we are, and I am happy to add my words to those that have been spoken in this session today.

Many years ago, I traveled on a small plane with a newly certified pilot at the controls. At the end of our flight, we were cleared to land. But as we neared the ground, I heard an alarm in the cockpit warn the pilot to "pull up." The pilot looked to the more experienced copilot, who pointed in a downward direction, away from the runway, and said, "Now!"

Our plane rapidly moved to the left and down, then climbed back to an appropriate altitude, reentered the landing pattern, and arrived safely at our destination. We later learned that another aircraft had been cleared for takeoff. Had we followed the instructions of the alarm, we would have veered into, rather than away from, the oncoming plane. This experience taught me two important lessons: First, at critical moments in our lives, we will hear multiple voices competing for our attention. And second, it is vital that we listen to the right ones.

Competing Voices

We live in a world with many voices seeking our attention. With all the breaking news, tweets, blogs, podcasts, and compelling advice from Alexa, Siri, and others, we can find it difficult to know which voices to trust. Sometimes we crowdsource guidance in our lives, thinking the majority will provide the best source of truth. Other times we “halt ... between two opinions,”¹ choosing to be “neither cold nor hot.”² Still other times we follow what is convenient, focus on a single voice or issue to guide us, or rely exclusively upon our own ability to think.

While each of these approaches can be helpful, experience teaches that they are not always reliable. What is popular is not always what is best. Halting between two opinions brings no direction. Convenience rarely leads to things that matter. Fixation on a single voice or issue can impair our ability to see. And relying solely upon our own thinking can lead us into a hyperintellectual stupor of thought. If we are not careful, the wrong voices can draw us away from the gospel center to places where faith is difficult to sustain, and we find little more than emptiness, bitterness, and dissatisfaction.

Listening to the Wrong Voice

Let me demonstrate what I mean by using an analogy and a scriptural example. Mountain climbers commonly refer to altitudes above 8,000 meters as the “death zone” because at those heights there is not enough oxygen to sustain life. There is a spiritual equivalent to the death zone. If we spend too much time in faithless places, seemingly well-intended voices deprive us of the spiritual oxygen we need.

In the Book of Mormon, we read of Korihor, who had such an experience. He enjoyed great popularity because his teachings were “pleasing [to] the carnal mind.”³ He said that parents and prophets teach foolish traditions designed to limit freedom and perpetuate ignorance.⁴ He argued that people should be free to do whatever they choose because commandments are nothing more than conveniently contrived restrictions.⁵ To him, belief

1. 1 Kings 18:21.

2. See Revelation 3:15–16.

3. Alma 30:53; see also Alma 30:18.

4. See Alma 30:14, 23–24, 27.

in the Atonement of Jesus Christ was “the effect of a frenzied mind,” created by belief in a being who could not exist because He could not be seen.⁶

Korihor created so much unrest that he was brought before the chief judge and the high priest. There, he rose “up in great swelling words,” criticizing the leaders and demanding a sign. A sign was given. He was struck so that he could not speak. Korihor then realized he had been deceived, and thinking of precious truths he had abandoned, he lamented, “I always knew.”⁷

Korihor then begged for food until he was trampled to death by a group of Zoramites.⁸ The final verse in his story contains this sober reflection: “And thus we see that the devil will not support his children at the last day, but doth speedily drag them down to hell.”⁹

The Right Voice

Because our Heavenly Father wants better for us, He makes it possible for us to hear His voice. Most often, we hear Him through impressions given by the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is the third member of the Godhead. He witnesses of the Father and the Son,¹⁰ was sent to “teach [us] all things,”¹¹ and will “show unto [us] all things what [we] should do.”¹²

The Spirit speaks to different people in different ways, and He may speak to the same person in different ways at different times. As a result, learning the many ways He speaks to us is a lifelong quest. Sometimes, He speaks to our “mind and in [our] heart”¹³ in a voice that is small yet powerful, piercing “them that ... hear to the center.”¹⁴ Other times His impressions “occupy [our] mind[s]” or “press ... upon [our] feelings.”¹⁵ Other times our bosom will “burn within [us].”¹⁶ Still other times He fills our souls with joy, enlightens our minds,¹⁷ or speaks peace to our troubled hearts.¹⁸

5. See Alma 30:17, 23, 27.

6. Alma 30:16; see also Alma 30:13, 15, 26, 28.

7. Alma 30:31, 52; see also Alma 30:23, 28, 43, 50, 53.

8. See Alma 30:56, 58–59.

9. Alma 30:60.

10. See 2 Nephi 31:18.

11. John 14:26.

12. 2 Nephi 32:5; see also 2 Nephi 32:1–4.

13. Doctrine and Covenants 8:2.

14. 3 Nephi 11:3.

15. Doctrine and Covenants 128:1.

16. Doctrine and Covenants 9:8.

17. See Doctrine and Covenants 6:14–15; 11:13.

18. See Doctrine and Covenants 6:22–23.

Finding His Voice

We will find our Father's voice in many places. We will find it when we pray, study the scriptures, attend church, engage in faithful discussions, or go to the temple. Surely, we will find it in conference this very weekend.

Today we sustained 15 men as prophets, seers, and revelators. Their spirituality and experience give them a unique perspective that we desperately need. Their messages are easy to find and spoken with absolute clarity. They tell us what God wants us to know, whether it is popular or not.¹⁹

Seeking His voice in any one of these places is good, but seeking it in many of them is even better. And when we hear it, we need to follow the direction that is given. The Apostle James said, "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only."²⁰ And President Thomas S. Monson once taught: "We watch. We wait. We listen for that still, small voice. When it speaks, wise men and women obey."²¹

When Direction Is Slow to Come

Early in my professional life, Sister Homer and I were asked to accept a change in job assignment. At the time, it seemed to us a huge decision. We studied, we fasted, and we prayed, but an answer was slow to come. Eventually, we made a decision and pressed forward. As we did, we felt settled and soon learned that it was one of the best decisions we had ever made.

As a result, we have learned that answers are sometimes slow to come. This can be because it is not the right time, because an answer is not needed, or because God trusts us to make the decision ourselves. Elder Richard G. Scott once taught that we should be grateful for such times and made this promise: "When you are living worthily and your choice is consistent with the Savior's teachings and you need to act, proceed with trust. ... God will not let you proceed too far without a warning impression if you have made the wrong decision."²²

19. See Doctrine and Covenants 1:38.

20. James 1:22.

21. Thomas S. Monson, "The Spirit Giveth Life," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, June 1997, 4.

22. Richard G. Scott, "Using the Supernal Gift of Prayer," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2007, 10.

We Must Choose

And so, we need to decide which among all the different voices we will obey. Will we follow the unreliable voices advocated by the world, or will we do the work required to allow our Father's voice to guide us in our decisions and protect us from danger? The more diligently we seek His voice, the easier it becomes to hear. It is not that His voice gets louder but that our ability to hear it has increased. The Savior has promised that if we "hearken unto [His] precepts, and lend an ear unto [His] counsel," He "will give [us] more."²³ I testify that this promise is true — for each of us.

Nearly a year ago, we lost my older brother in a tragic automobile accident. John's early years were full of promise and accomplishment. But as he grew older, a broken body and uncooperative mind made life very difficult. While the healing he hoped for didn't come in this life, John nonetheless held to his faith, determined to endure, as best he could, to the end.

Now, I know that John was not perfect, but I have wondered what it was that gave him such endurance. Many voices invited him into the cynical fringe, but he chose not to go. Instead, he did his best to anchor his life at the gospel center. He lived his life there because he knew he would find the voice of his Master there; he lived his life there because he knew it was there that he would be taught.

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, in a world with so many competing voices, I testify that our Heavenly Father has made it possible for us to hear and follow His. If we are diligent, He and His Son will give us the direction we seek, the strength we need, and the happiness we all desire. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

23. 2 Nephi 28:30.

Behold the Lamb of God

By Elder Jeffrey R. Holland
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



Our modified Sunday service is to emphasize the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as the sacred, acknowledged focal point of our weekly worship experience.

I WAS DOING just fine until I saw the tears in the eyes of those young people in this choir. Those tears are a more eloquent sermon than I could ever give.

Looking up from water's edge, past the eager crowds seeking baptism at his hand, John, called the Baptist, saw in the distance his cousin, Jesus of Nazareth, striding resolutely toward him to make a request for that same ordinance. Reverently, but audible enough for those nearby to hear, John uttered the admiration that still moves us two millennia later: "Behold the Lamb of God."¹

It is instructive that this long-prophesied forerunner to Jesus did not call Him "Jehovah" or "Savior" or "Redeemer" or even "the Son of God" — all of which were applicable titles. No, John chose the earliest and perhaps most commonly recognized image in the religious tradition of his people. He used the figure of a sacrificial lamb offered in atonement for the sins and sorrows of a fallen world and all the fallen people in it.

Please indulge me in recalling just a little of that history.

After expulsion from the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve faced a devastating future. Having opened the door to mortality and temporal life for us, they had closed the door to immortality

1. John 1:29.

and eternal life for themselves. Due to a transgression they had consciously chosen to make in our behalf, they now faced physical death and spiritual banishment, separation from the presence of God forever.² What were they to do? Would there be a way out of this plight? We are not certain just how much these two were allowed to remember of the instruction they received while still in the garden, but they *did* remember they were to regularly offer for a sacrifice unto God a pure, unblemished lamb, the first male born of their flock.³

Later an angel came to explain that this sacrifice was a type, a prefiguration of the offering that would be made in their behalf by the Savior of the world who was to come. “This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father,” the angel said. “Wherefore, ... thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore.”⁴ Fortunately, there was going to be a way out and a way up.

In the premortal councils of heaven, God had promised Adam and Eve (and all the rest of us) that help would come from His pure, unblemished Firstborn Son, the Lamb of God “slain from the foundation of the world,”⁵ as the Apostle John would later describe Him. By offering their own little symbolic lambs in mortality, Adam and his posterity were expressing their understanding of and their dependence upon the atoning sacrifice of Jesus the Anointed One.⁶ Later, the wilderness tabernacle would become the setting for this ordinance and, after that, the temple that Solomon would build.

Unfortunately, as a symbol of genuine repentance and faithful living, this ritualistic offering of unblemished little lambs didn’t work very well, as so much of the Old Testament reveals. The moral resolve that should have accompanied those sacrifices sometimes didn’t last long enough for the blood to dry upon the stones. In any case, it didn’t last long enough to preclude fratricide, with Cain killing his brother Abel in the first generation.⁷

2. See 2 Nephi 9:8–9.

3. See Moses 5:5; see also Exodus 12:3–10.

4. Moses 5:7–8; see also Moses 5:9.

5. Revelation 13:8.

6. See Bible Dictionary, “Anointed One”; see also Guide to the Scriptures, “Anointed One,” scriptures.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.

With such trials and troubles going on for centuries, no wonder the angels of heaven sang for joy when, finally, Jesus was born — the long-promised Messiah Himself. Following His brief mortal ministry, this purest of all Passover sheep prepared His disciples for His death by introducing the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, a more personal form of the ordinance that had been introduced just outside of Eden. There would still be an offering, it would still involve a sacrifice, but it would be with symbolism much deeper, much more introspective and personal than the bloodletting of a firstborn lamb. To the Nephites, after His Resurrection, the Savior said of this:

"Ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood. ...

"... Ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost. ...

"... Therefore repent, ... and be saved."⁸

My beloved brothers and sisters, with the exciting new emphasis on increased gospel learning in the home, it is crucial for us to remember that we are still commanded to "go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day."⁹ In addition to making time for more home-centered gospel instruction, our modified Sunday service is also to reduce the complexity of the meeting schedule in a way that properly emphasizes the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as the sacred, acknowledged focal point of our weekly worship experience. We are to remember in as personal a way as possible that Christ died from a heart broken by shouldering entirely alone the sins and sorrows of the whole human family.

Inasmuch as we contributed to that fatal burden, such a moment demands our respect. Thus, we are encouraged to

7. Ironically, Cain's slaying of Abel, an act ultimately directed by Satan, may have been linked to Cain's earlier anger over his sacrificial offering being rejected by the Lord while Abel's was accepted. "God ... prepared a sacrifice in the gift of His own Son, who should ... open a door through which man might enter into the Lord's presence. ... "By faith in this atonement or plan of redemption,

Abel offered to God a sacrifice that was accepted, which was the firstlings of the flock. Cain offered of the fruit of the ground, and was not accepted. ... [His sacrifice was to have included] the shedding of blood" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 48; see also 107–8).

8. 3 Nephi 9:19–20, 22.

9. Doctrine and Covenants 59:9.

come to our services early and reverently, dressed appropriately for participation in a sacred ordinance. “Sunday best” has lost a little of its meaning in our time, and out of esteem for Him into whose presence we come, we ought to restore that tradition of Sabbath dress and grooming when and where we can.

As for punctuality, a late pass will always be lovingly granted to those blessed mothers who, with children and Cheerios and diaper bags trailing in marvelous disarray, are lucky to have made it to church at all. Furthermore, there will be others who unavoidably find their ox in the mire on a Sabbath morning. However, to this latter group we say an occasional tardiness is understandable, but if the ox is in the mire every Sunday, then we strongly recommend that you sell the ox or fill the mire.

In that same spirit, we make an apostolic plea for the reduction of clamor in the sanctuary of our buildings. We love to visit with each other, and we should — it is one of the joys of church attendance — but it ought not be pursued so vocally in space specifically dedicated for worship. I fear that visitors not of our faith are shocked by what can sometimes be noisy irreverence in a setting that is supposed to be characterized by prayer, testimony, revelation, and peace. Perhaps heaven is a little shocked as well.

It will add to the spirit of our sacrament meetings if the presiding officers are on the stand well before the meeting is to begin, listening to the prelude music and reverently setting the example the rest of us ought to follow. If there is chatter on the stand, we shouldn’t be surprised at chatter in the congregation. We congratulate those bishoprics who are eliminating announcements that detract from the spirit of our worship. I, for one, cannot imagine a priest such as Zacharias — there in the ancient temple of the Lord, about to participate in the one and only priestly privilege that would come to him in his entire lifetime — I just cannot picture him pausing before the altar to remind us that the pinewood derby is just six weeks away and registration will soon be due.

Brothers and sisters, this hour ordained of the Lord is the most sacred hour of our week. By commandment, we gather for

the most universally received ordinance in the Church. It is in memory of Him who asked if the cup He was about to drink could pass, only to press on because He knew that for *our* sake it could *not* pass. It will help us if we remember that a symbol of that cup is slowly making its way down the row toward us at the hand of an 11- or 12-year-old deacon.

When the sacred hour comes to present our sacrificial gift to the Lord, we do have our own sins and shortcomings to resolve; that's why we're there. But we might be more successful in such contrition if we are mindful of the other broken hearts and sorrowing spirits that surround us. Seated not far away are some who may have wept — outwardly or inwardly — through the entire sacramental hymn and the prayers of those priests. Might we silently take note of that and offer our little crust of comfort and our tiny cup of compassion — might we dedicate it to them? or to the weeping, struggling member who is *not* in the service and, except for some redemptive ministering on our part, won't be there next week either? or to our brothers and sisters who are not members of the Church at all but are our brothers and sisters? There is no shortage of suffering in this world, inside the Church and out, so look in any direction and you will find someone whose pain seems too heavy to bear and whose heartache seems never to end. One way to “always remember him”¹⁰ would be to join the Great Physician in His never-ending task of lifting the load from those who are burdened and relieving the pain of those who are distraught.

Beloved friends, as we unite across the globe each week in what we hope is an increasingly sacred acknowledgment of Christ's majestic atoning gift to all humankind, may we bring to the sacramental altar “more tears for his sorrows [and] more pain at his grief.” And then, as we reflect, pray, and covenant anew, may we take *from* that sacred moment “more patience in suff'ring, ... more praise for relief.”¹¹ For such patience and relief, for such holiness and hope, I pray for all of you in the name of Him who broke the precious bread of forgiveness and poured the holy wine of redemption, even Jesus Christ, the great and merciful and holy Lamb of God, amen.

10. Moroni 4:3; 5:2.

11. “More Holiness Give Me,” *Hymns*, 131.

Your Priesthood Playbook

By Elder Gary E. Stevenson
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



Create your own playbook of how you will prove yourself as a disciple of Christ.

LAST DECEMBER, THE First Presidency issued a statement announcing that 11-year-old boys would “begin attending ... Aaronic Priesthood quorums ... at the beginning of January in the year they turn 12.”¹

As a result, during the first part of this year, there were quite a few startled 11-year-olds who had assumed they would be staying in Primary until their next birthday but were now passing the sacrament on Sundays as the Church’s newest ordained deacons.

I wonder who was surprised most by the change — the deacons or their parents. Of these almost 80,000 new deacons, many are with us tonight in this great Conference Center or are participating through technology. Welcome to the great brotherhood of the priesthood!

This change makes this meeting a historic one — it is likely the largest group of Aaronic Priesthood holders ever to attend a general priesthood session of general conference. In light of this special occasion, I direct my remarks especially to the young men of the Aaronic Priesthood.

1. “Age-Group Progression for Children and Youth,” First Presidency letter, Dec. 14, 2018.

Lessons Learned from Sports

As students, many of you are also developing your talents, interests, and hobbies through extracurricular activities at school or in private lessons, teams, and groups outside of school, including sports.

Having enjoyed sports throughout my life, I have always admired those who develop their athletic abilities to the point where they perform at high levels. For someone to be really good at anything, it takes, in addition to natural talent, great discipline, sacrifice, and countless hours of training and practice. Such athletes often hear the sometimes-harsh criticisms of coaches and willingly put aside what they want now for something greater in the future.

We know Church members and priesthood holders who have experienced success at the highest levels of professional athletics. There are many good examples, but I can list only a few here for the sake of time. You might recognize some of these athletes: in baseball, Jeremy Guthrie and Bryce Harper; in basketball, Jabari Parker and Jimmer Fredette; in soccer, Ricardo Rojas; in rugby league, William Hopoate; and in football, Taysom Hill and Daniel Sorensen. Each has made significant contributions to his sport.

While they are extremely successful in their sports, these athletes would be the first to admit they are not perfect athletes or perfect human beings. They work hard to be the best in their sport — and to live the gospel. They get up if they stumble, and they strive to endure to the end.

Study the Playbook

In team sports, plays are developed for certain game situations and compiled into a playbook. Athletes learn their specific assignment for each play. Successful players study the playbook so thoroughly that when a play is called, they know exactly, almost instinctively, where to go and what to do.

In a similar way, we holders of the priesthood also have a team (a quorum) and a playbook (the holy scriptures and words of modern prophets).

- Do you strengthen your teammates?
- How well have you studied your playbook?
- Do you fully understand your assignment?

Confronting the Opposition

To take the analogy even further, great coaches know the strengths and weaknesses of their team as well as those of the opposition. They create a game plan that will give them the best chance for victory. What about you?

You know what temptations you are most vulnerable to, and you can predict how the adversary will try to derail and dishearten you. Have you created a personal game plan and playbook so that you will know how to respond when faced with opposition?

As you confront various moral temptations — whether in the company of others or when you are alone staring at a screen — you know your game plan. If a friend suggests you drink alcohol or try drugs, you know the play. You have practiced and know how to react in advance.

With a game plan, a playbook, and a firm commitment to execute your role, you will find that temptation has less control over you. You will have already made the decision of how you will react and what you will do. You won't need to decide every time you are confronted with temptation.

One of the Twelve recently shared a story that illustrates this principle. As a priest in high school, he was hanging out with his friends. After they got something to eat, they were driving around when someone suggested they should go to a certain movie. The problem was he knew it was a movie he shouldn't see. Although he immediately felt pressure and anxiety about the situation, he had planned for this. This was a page straight out of his priesthood playbook.

Taking a deep breath and summoning his courage, he announced, "I'm not interested in that movie. Just drop me off at my house," which they did. A simple play leading to a victory! Years later, one of the friends with him that night described

how this example proved to be a great strength for him to courageously face similar circumstances in his own life.

Pages from the Playbook

I asked a few of the Brethren to recommend plays you might include in your playbook. Here are some of their inspired suggestions:

- Pray every day for greater light and a testimony of Jesus Christ.
- Listen carefully to the teachings of your parents, your bishop, and your Young Men and quorum leaders.
- Avoid pornography and immoral social media content.
- Remember the promises you have made to God, and work to keep them.
- Study scripture stories of great prophets, and emulate their good qualities.
- Bless Heavenly Father's children through service.
- Seek good friends to help you become the person you want to be.
- Become an expert in the FamilySearch app, and research your own family history.
- Plan places of retreat where you can escape evil influences.
- Love and help strengthen other members of your priesthood quorum.

I also communicated with the athletes whose pictures we viewed earlier. I found it interesting that they do not identify themselves only by what they *do*, as professional athletes, but also by who they *are*, as sons of a loving Heavenly Father and holders of the priesthood of God.

Now let's listen to their thoughts:

Jimmer Fredette, here as a deacon learning to tie his tie, says: "I have learned to lean heavily on my knowledge and faith of the truthfulness of the gospel. This has guided me to be ... a worthy priesthood holder and above all — a positive example."

Bryce Harper, here as a husband, writes: “I thought fame, fortune, and an MVP award would make me happy. Something was missing. So, I ... prepared and [entered] the temple. I am now on a path to [return] to my Heavenly Father and have an eternal family — which is the greatest joy in the world!”

Daniel Sorensen, here as a missionary, says: “A good playbook is a plan that uses the talents and strengths of each team member. ... As I study and practice the teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ, I can know how to use my strengths to serve in the priesthood.”

Jeremy Guthrie, here currently serving as mission president, shared: “As a 12-year-old deacon ... [I felt] the Spirit testify to me [that] ‘this life is the time ... to prepare to meet God.’² The game plan is faith in God unto action [and] repentance through the Savior. ... The playbook is found in the holy scriptures and through living prophets.”

Jabari Parker, here at his ordination to the office of elder, says: “I couldn’t imagine the person that I would’ve turned out to be if I hadn’t made the decision to be baptized. ... I’m so grateful that I have God in my life to guide me every day.”

Ricardo Rojas, here currently serving as branch president, said: “Through [God’s] priesthood [we] can help in His work. We are called to ‘be strong and of a good courage’³ in defending the truth.” This has helped him succeed both on the pitch and as a priesthood holder.

Taysom Hill, here as a missionary, feels the gospel of Jesus Christ has served as a playbook for him in his life. He shared, “Believing in [God’s] plan and doing my best to fulfill my role in it has given me an overwhelming sense of peace and happiness in life, knowing God is pleased with my efforts.”

William Hopoate, here at his son’s baby blessing with four generations, says that the gospel helps him “identify the opposition’s strategies and provides the spiritual efficacy to withstand fiery darts and better serve others.”

2. Alma 34:32.

3. Joshua 1:9.

What about you? Do you recognize your higher and holier identity as a son of God, a bearer of His holy priesthood? With this eternal identity in mind, create your game plan and priesthood playbook that will guide you during times of temptation and adversity. Consider both offensive and defensive strategies.

Offensive strategies help strengthen testimonies and increase resolve to stay on the strait and narrow path. Examples include regular prayer, scripture study, church and temple attendance, paying tithing, and following the counsel found in the *For the Strength of Youth* booklet.

Defensive strategies include planning ahead how you will face temptation. When tempted to compromise your personal standards, you know beforehand what you will do.

You need a playbook for that.

Don't feel like praying today? Time to execute the play you already game-planned.

Do you feel your testimony waning? You have a play for that. You know what to do.

All-Stars in God's Eyes

You are bearers of the holy priesthood of God. Your commitment to hold firmly the iron rod will transform you into the eternal being who you were created to become.

God knows and loves you. He will bless you and guide your steps.

You might be thinking that you are no one special, that you are not all-star material. But that is not true. Don't you know that God has proclaimed, "The weak things of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones"?⁴

So, do you feel weak? insignificant? Congratulations, you just made the lineup! Do you feel unimportant? inferior? You may be just who God needs.

4. Doctrine and Covenants 1:19.

David and Goliath

What greater example is there than David stepping onto the battlefield against a frightening opponent, Goliath? Relying on the Lord, with a plan, David saved not only himself but the army of Israel!⁵ Know that the Lord will be with you as you summon your courage to be on His side. “If God be for us, who can be against us?”⁶

He can open doors and help us find strengths and abilities we never knew we had.⁷

Listen to your trusted coaches, such as your parents, bishop, and Young Men leaders. Learn the playbook. Read the scriptures. Study the words of modern-day prophets. Create your own game plan of how you will prove yourself as a disciple of Christ.

Know in advance the plays you will employ to strengthen your spirit and avoid the snares of the adversary.

Do this and God will surely utilize you.

Now, there may be some who detach themselves from the gospel and wander away. Others may sit in the stands and watch the game from afar. Some may choose to stay on the bench, even though the coach has tried to send them in. *I invite you to rescue, support, and love them as a fellow team member!*

Others want to get in the game — and *do*. What matters most is not how talented they are but their willingness to put themselves on the field. They do not wait to have their number called, because they know the scripture that says, “If ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the work.”⁸

You can put yourself in the lineup.

You do this as you study and execute your priesthood playbook.

Along the way you will most likely stumble and fall — perhaps many, many times. You are not perfect; falling is part of the qualifying process that allows you to refine your character and

5. See 1 Samuel 17.

6. Romans 8:31.

7. See Ether 12:27.

8. Doctrine and Covenants 4:3.

serve in a more compassionate way. The Savior and His infinite Atonement provide the way to overcome our mistakes through sincere repentance.

Great athletes spend hundreds of hours perfecting one small aspect of their game. As a priesthood holder, you need the same mind-set. If you fail, repent and learn from it. Practice so you will do better the next time. Ultimately, it's up to you. Will you learn the playbook?

I urge you: Trust in the Lord. Put on the whole armor of God,⁹ and get in the game.

There aren't many who play professional sports at the highest levels, but when it comes to discipleship, there are many who choose to follow Christ.

In fact, that is your mission in this life — to learn the ways of the Lord, enter the path of discipleship, and strive to live according to God's plan. God will uphold and bless you as you turn to Him. You can do this because you are an all-star in His eyes.

I pray that you will make the commitment to live worthy of the holy priesthood that you bear and strive to execute your sacred role every day. I bless you with the ability and desire to do so. I add my testimony of the power of the priesthood that you hold, of living prophets, and of Jesus Christ and His role as our Savior and Redeemer. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

9. See Doctrine and Covenants 27:15–18.

The Quorum: A Place of Belonging

By Elder Carl B. Cook
Of the Presidency of the Seventy



The Lord would have you establish a strong quorum. As He gathers His children, they need a place to belong and grow.

IN 2010, ANDRE Sebako was a young man seeking for truth. Though he had never offered a heartfelt prayer before, he decided to try. Shortly afterward he met the missionaries. They gave him a pass-along card with a picture of the Book of Mormon. Andre felt something and asked if the missionaries would sell him the book. They said he could have the book for free if he would come to church.¹

Andre attended the then-recently created Mochudi Branch in Botswana, Africa, alone. But the branch was a loving, tight-knit group consisting of about 40 members.² They welcomed Andre with open arms. He received the missionary lessons and was baptized. It was wonderful!

But then what? How would Andre stay active? Who would help him progress along the covenant path? One answer to that question is his priesthood quorum!³

1. See Mark and Shirley Taylor, comp., *The Band of Brothers* (Mochudi Branch conversion stories and testimonies, 2012–13), 4, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

2. Personal correspondence, Letanang Andre Sebako, Band of Brothers resource files, 2011–19, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

3. President Boyd K. Packer said: “When a man holds the priesthood, he belongs to something bigger than himself. It is something outside himself to which he can make a complete commitment” (“The Circle of Sisters,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, 109–10).

Every priesthood holder, regardless of his situation, benefits from a strong quorum. My young brothers who hold the Aaronic Priesthood, the Lord would have you establish a strong quorum, a place of belonging for each and every young man, a place where the Lord's Spirit is present, a place where all quorum members are welcome and valued. As the Lord gathers His children, they need a place to belong and grow.

Each of you quorum presidency members lead the way as you seek inspiration⁴ and develop love and brotherhood among all quorum members. You give special attention to those who are new members, who are less active, or who have special needs.⁵ With priesthood power, you build a strong quorum.⁶ And a strong, united quorum makes all the difference in the life of a young man.

When the Church announced the new home-centered focus on gospel learning,⁷ some thought of members like Andre and asked, "What about the young people who come from a family situation where the gospel is not studied and where there is not an environment of learning and living the gospel at home? Will they be left behind?"

4. President Russell M. Nelson explained how to seek revelation and then stated, "As you repeat this process day after day, month after month, year after year, you will 'grow into the principle of revelation'" ("Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2018, 95; see also *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 132).
5. See *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 8.3.2.
6. Others help also, including bishopric members and advisers. Elder Ronald A. Rasband noted that one of the benefits of the restructuring of the Melchizedek Priesthood quorums, announced on March 31, 2018, is to "allow the bishop to delegate more responsibilities to the elders quorum and Relief Society presidents so that the bishop and his counselors can focus on their primary duties—particularly presiding over the young women and the young men who bear

the Aaronic Priesthood" ("Behold! A Royal Army," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2018, 59). Angels will also help. Aaronic Priesthood holders hold the keys of the ministering of angels (see Doctrine and Covenants 13:1; see also Dale G. Renlund and Ruth Lybbert Renlund, *The Melchizedek Priesthood* [2018], 26). Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said: "Usually [ministering angels] are not seen. Sometimes they are. But seen or unseen they are always near. Sometimes their assignments are very grand and have significance for the whole world. Sometimes the messages are more private. Occasionally the angelic purpose is to warn. But most often it is to comfort, to provide some form of merciful attention, guidance in difficult times" ("The Ministry of Angels," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2008, 29). If you desire such help, you can "ask, and ye shall receive" (John 16:24).

No! No one can be left behind! The Lord loves each young man and each young woman. We, as priesthood holders, are the Lord's hands. We are the Church support to home-centered efforts. When there is limited support at home, priesthood quorums and other leaders and friends watch over and support each individual and family as needed.

I have seen it work. I have experienced it. When I was six, my parents divorced and my father left my mother with five young children. My mother began working to provide for us. She needed a second job for a period of time, as well as additional education. There was little time for her to nurture. But grandparents, uncles, aunts, bishops, and home teachers stepped up to help my angel mother.

And I had a quorum. I am so grateful for my friends — my brothers — who loved and supported me. My quorum was a place of belonging. Some may have considered me a long shot and an underdog because of my family situation. Maybe I was. But priesthood quorums changed those odds. My quorum rallied around me and blessed my life immeasurably.

There are long shots and underdogs all around us. Perhaps we all are in one way or another. But each of us here has a quorum, a place where we can both receive strength and provide strength. The quorum is “all for one and one for all.”⁸ It is a place where we instruct each other, serve others, and build unity and brotherhood as we serve God.⁹ It is a place where miracles happen.

I would like to tell you about some of the miracles that occurred in Andre's quorum in Mochudi. As I share this example, watch for principles that strengthen every priesthood quorum that applies them.

After Andre was baptized, he accompanied the missionaries as they taught four other young men, who were also baptized. Now there were five young men. They began strengthening each other and the branch.

7. See Russell M. Nelson, “Opening Remarks,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 7–8.

8. See Alexandre Dumas, *The Three Musketeers* (1844).

9. See *Handbook 2*, 8.1.2.

A sixth young man, Thuso, was baptized. Thuso shared the gospel with three of his friends, and soon there were nine.

Disciples of Jesus Christ are often gathered this way — a few at a time, as invited by their friends. Anciently, when Andrew found the Savior, he went quickly to his brother Simon and “brought him to Jesus.”¹⁰ Similarly, soon after Philip became a follower of Christ, he invited his friend Nathanael to “come and see.”¹¹

In Mochudi, a 10th young man soon joined the Church. The missionaries found the 11th. And the 12th young man was baptized after seeing the gospel’s effect on his friends.

Members of the Mochudi Branch were thrilled. These young men “were converted unto the Lord, and ... united unto the church.”¹²

The Book of Mormon played a significant role in their conversion.¹³ Thuso remembers, “I began reading the Book of Mormon ... every time I was free, at home, at school, everywhere.”¹⁴

Oratile was drawn to the gospel because of the example of his friends. He explains: “[They] seemed to change in the snap of a finger. ... I thought it had ... to do with the little ... book they started carrying around ... school. I could see what good men they had become. ... [I] wanted to change too.”¹⁵

All 12 young men were gathered and baptized within two years of each other. Each was the only member of the Church in his family. But they were supported by their Church family, including President Rakwela,¹⁶ their branch president; Elder and Sister Taylor,¹⁷ a senior missionary couple; and other branch members.

10. See John 1:40–42.

11. See John 1:43–46.

12. 3 Nephi 28:23.

13. See D. Todd Christofferson, “The Power of the Book of Mormon” (address given at the seminar for new mission presidents, June 27, 2017).

14. Thuso Molefe, in Taylor, *The Band of Brothers*, 22.

15. Oratile Molosankwa, in Taylor, *The Band of Brothers*, 31–32.

16. Lucas Rakwela, Mochudi, Botswana.

17. Mark and Shirley Taylor, Idaho, USA.

18. Cilvester Junior Kgosiemang, Mochudi, Botswana.

Brother Junior,¹⁸ a quorum leader, invited the young men to his home on Sunday afternoons and mentored them. The young men studied the scriptures together and held regular home evenings.

Brother Junior took them to visit members, people being taught by the missionaries, and anyone else who needed a visit. All 12 young men piled into the back of Brother Junior's truck. He dropped them off at homes in companionships of two or three and picked them up later.

Even though the young men were just learning about the gospel and didn't feel they knew much, Brother Junior told them to share one or two things they did know with the people they visited. These young priesthood holders taught, prayed, and helped watch over the Church.¹⁹ They fulfilled their priesthood responsibilities and experienced the joy of serving.

Andre said, "We played together, laughed together, cried together, and became a brotherhood."²⁰ In fact, they call themselves "the Band of Brothers."

Together they set a goal that they would all serve missions. Since they were the only Church members in their families, they had many obstacles to overcome, but they helped each other through them.

One by one, the young men received mission calls. Those who left first wrote letters home to those still preparing, sharing experiences and encouraging them to serve. Eleven of the young men served missions.

These young men shared the gospel with their families. Mothers, sisters, brothers, friends, as well as people they taught on their missions, were converted and baptized. Miracles occurred and countless lives were blessed.

I can hear some of you thinking that perhaps such a miracle could happen only in a place like Africa, a fertile field where the gathering of Israel is hastening. However, I testify that the

19. See Doctrine and Covenants 20:46–47, 53–54.

20. Personal correspondence, Letanang Andre Sebako, Band of Brothers resource files.

principles applied in the Mochudi Branch are true anywhere. Wherever you are, your quorum can grow through activation and sharing the gospel. When even one disciple reaches out to a friend, one can become two. Two can become four. Four can become eight. And eight can become twelve. Branches can become wards.

The Savior taught, “Where two or three [or more] are gathered together in my name, ... behold, there will I be in the midst of them.”²¹ Heavenly Father is preparing the minds and hearts of people all around us. We can follow promptings, extend a hand of fellowship, share truth, invite others to read the Book of Mormon, and love and support them as they come to know our Savior.

It has been almost 10 years since the Mochudi Band of Brothers started their journey together, and they are still a band of brothers.

Katlego said, “We may be separated by distance but we are still there for each other.”²²

It is my prayer that we will accept the Lord’s invitation to be united with Him in our priesthood quorums so that each quorum might be a place of belonging, a place of gathering, a place that grows.

Jesus Christ is our Savior, and this is His work. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

21. Doctrine and Covenants 6:32.

22. Katlego Mongole, in “Band of Brothers 2nd Generation” (unpublished compilation), 21.

Look unto Jesus Christ

By Elder Kim B. Clark
Of the Seventy



If we look to Jesus Christ, He will help us live our covenants and magnify our calling as elders in Israel.

AS JESUS WALKED in a street near Capernaum¹ with a great crowd of people around Him, a woman afflicted with a serious condition for 12 years reached out and touched the hem of His garment. Immediately she was healed.²

The scriptures record that Jesus, perceiving “that [power had] gone out of [Him],”³ “turned him about in the press”⁴ and “looked ... to see her that had done this thing.”⁵ “When the woman saw that she was not hid,”⁶ she “fell down before him, and told him all the truth.”⁷

Jesus said unto her, “Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.”⁸

Jesus Christ saved the woman. She was healed physically, but when Jesus turned to see her, she declared her faith in Him and He healed her heart.⁹ He spoke to her with love, assured her of His approval, and blessed her with His peace.¹⁰

1. James E. Talmage places Jesus in “the vicinity of Capernaum” when this healing occurred (see *Jesus the Christ* [1916], 313).

2. See Luke 8:43–44; see also Matthew 9:20–21; Mark 5:25–29.

3. Luke 8:46.

4. Mark 5:30.

5. Mark 5:32.

6. Luke 8:47.

7. Mark 5:33.

8. Luke 8:48.

9. James E. Talmage wrote that of greater worth to the woman than the physical healing was the assurance that the Savior had granted the desire of her heart and that her faith was accepted of Him (see *Jesus the Christ*, 318). Jesus healed her physically and spiritually and opened to her the way to salvation.

Brethren, as bearers of the holy priesthood, we are engaged in the work of salvation. In the last year, the Lord has placed the leadership of this work squarely on the shoulders of the elders in Israel.¹¹ We have an inspiring charge from the Lord— working with our sisters, we are to minister in a holier way, accelerate the gathering of Israel on both sides of the veil, establish our homes as sanctuaries of faith and gospel learning, and prepare the world for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.¹²

As in all things, the Savior has shown us the way: we need to look to and serve Jesus Christ as He looked to and served His Father.¹³ The Savior said it this way to the Prophet Joseph:

“Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not.

“Behold the wounds which pierced my side, and also the prints of the nails in my hands and feet; be faithful, keep my commandments, and ye shall inherit the kingdom of heaven.”¹⁴

In the premortal realm, Jesus promised His Father that He would

10. It is instructive that Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, was with Jesus when this healing occurred. Jesus was on the way to the house of Jairus, where He would raise Jairus’s daughter from the dead. The woman that Jesus healed had likely been cast out of the synagogue because of her affliction. When Jesus healed her, He also made clear to all who were there, including Jairus, that she was a beloved daughter, a woman of faith, and whole in body and spirit.
11. See D. Todd Christofferson, “The Elders Quorum” (*Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2018, 55–58) for a discussion of the adjustments to create one Melchizedek Priesthood quorum in a ward. The purpose of that change was described this way in the Frequently Asked Questions section of the Ministering website: “Having one Melchizedek Priesthood quorum in a ward unifies priesthood holders to accomplish all aspects of the work of salvation, including temple and family history work previously coordinated by the high priests group leader” (“This Is Ministering: Frequently Asked Questions,” question 8, ministering.ChurchofJesusChrist.org). Subsequent adjustments have placed the ward mission leader and the new temple and family history leader in the ward under the direction of the presidency of the elders quorum. With ministering to families already under the presidency’s direction, these adjustments have placed leadership of the work of salvation in the elders quorums, assisted by Relief Societies. Of course, the bishop holds the keys to the work of salvation in the ward, but he delegates responsibility and authority for that work to the elders quorum president so that the bishop can spend more time ministering to his own family, strengthening the youth, and serving as a judge in Israel.
12. See Russell M. Nelson, “Let Us All Press On,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2018, 118–19; Russell M. Nelson, “Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 113–14; Quentin L. Cook, “Deep and Lasting Conversion to Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 8–12.
13. The Father sent Jesus Christ into the world (see John 17:18).
14. Doctrine and Covenants 6:36–37.
15. Abraham 3:27.

do His Father's will and be our Savior and Redeemer. When His Father asked, "Whom shall I send?"¹⁵ Jesus answered:

*"Here am I, send me."*¹⁶

*"Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever."*¹⁷

All through His mortal life, Jesus lived that promise. In humility, meekness, and love, He taught His Father's doctrine and did His Father's work with the power and authority His Father had given Him.¹⁸

Jesus gave His heart to His Father. He said:

*"I love the Father."*¹⁹

*"I do always those things that please him."*²⁰

*"I came ... not to do mine own will, but the will of [the Father, who] sent me."*²¹

In His agony in Gethsemane, He prayed, "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done."²²

When the Lord calls the elders in Israel to "look unto me in every thought" and "behold the wounds" in His resurrected body, it is a call to turn away from sin and the world and to turn to Him and love and obey Him. It is a call to teach His doctrine and do His work in His way. It is, therefore, a call to trust Him completely, surrender our will and yield our hearts to Him, and through His redeeming power become like Him.²³

Brethren, if we look unto Jesus Christ, He will bless us to be *His* elders in Israel — humble, meek, submissive, full of His love.²⁴

16. Abraham 3:27.

17. Moses 4:2.

18. There are numerous references in the scriptures that record statements Jesus made about doing His Father's work and teaching His Father's doctrine. See, for example, John 5:19 (Jesus does what He sees the Father do); John 5:36 (the Father gave His Son work to do); John 8:26 (Jesus taught what He had received from His Father); John 14:28 (Jesus declared, "My Father is greater than I"); 3 Nephi 11:32 (His doctrine is the doctrine His Father gave Him).

19. John 14:31.

20. John 8:29.

21. John 6:38; see also John 5:30.

22. Luke 22:42.

23. The word look in this passage (see Doctrine and Covenants 6:36–37) has meanings that correspond to the call of the Lord: to face (or turn to); to direct one's attention to; to rely upon; to search for; to await with hope; to have in mind as an end; to expect or anticipate (see merriam-webster.com, "look").

And we will bring the joy and blessings of His gospel and His Church to our families and our brothers and sisters on both sides of the veil.

President Russell M. Nelson has called us to look unto Jesus Christ in just this way: “There is nothing easy or automatic about becoming such powerful disciples. Our focus must be riveted on the Savior and His gospel. It is mentally rigorous to strive to look unto Him in *every* thought. But when we do, our doubts and fears flee.”²⁵

Rivet is a great word. It means to fasten firmly, to attract and hold completely.²⁶ We rivet our focus on Jesus Christ and His gospel by living our covenants.

When we live our covenants, they influence everything we say and do. We live a covenant life²⁷ full of simple, everyday acts of faith that focus us on Jesus Christ: prayer from the heart in *His* name, feasting on *His* word, turning to *Him* to repent of our sins, keeping *His* commandments, partaking of the sacrament and keeping *His* Sabbath holy, worshipping in *His* holy temple as often as we can, and exercising *His* holy priesthood to serve God’s children.

These acts of covenant devotion open our hearts and minds to the redeeming power of the Savior and the sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost. Line upon line, the Savior changes our very nature, we become more deeply converted unto Him, and our covenants come alive in our hearts.²⁸

The promises we make to our Heavenly Father become rock-solid commitments, our deepest desires. Heavenly Father’s

24. See Doctrine and Covenants 121:41–42. The Christlike attributes mentioned in the scripture are gifts of the Spirit that come through the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ. They are what make the elders in Israel His elders.

25. Russell M. Nelson, “Drawing the Power of Jesus Christ into Our Lives,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2017, 41.

26. See merriam-webster.com, “rivet.”

27. For a discussion of the concept of a covenant life, see Donald L. Hallstrom, “Living a Covenant Life,” *Ensign*, June 2013, 46–49. This article was adapted

from a longer talk given at Brigham Young University–Idaho in May 2011. For the longer version, see Donald L. Hallstrom, “A Covenant Life” (Brigham Young University–Idaho devotional, May 10, 2011), byui.edu.

28. See Jeremiah 31:31–33, where the Lord declares that He will make a new covenant with the house of Israel written in their hearts. This image of covenants written in our hearts, or covenants that come alive in our hearts, is also found in the writings of Paul (see 2 Corinthians 3:3; Hebrews

promises to us fill us with gratitude and joy.²⁹ Our covenants cease to be rules we follow and become beloved principles that inspire and guide us and rivet our focus on Jesus Christ.³⁰

These acts of devotion are available to all, young and old. You young men who hold the holy Aaronic Priesthood, everything I have said tonight applies to you. I thank God for you. You make sacred ordinances and covenants available to millions of Latter-day Saints every week. When you prepare, bless, or pass the sacrament; minister; baptize in the temple; invite a friend to an activity; or rescue a member of your quorum, you are doing the work of salvation. You too can look unto Jesus Christ and live your covenants every day. I promise you that if you do, you will be trusted servants of the Lord now and, in a coming day, mighty elders in Israel.

Brethren, I know that all of this may sound daunting. But please remember these words of the Savior: “I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”³¹ So it is with us. We are not alone. The Lord Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father love us, and They are with us.³² Because Jesus looked to His Father and completed the great atoning sacrifice, we can look to Jesus Christ with assurance that He will help us.

8:10). For a discussion of conversion and the heart, see David A. Bednar, “Converted unto the Lord,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2012, 106–9.

29. The sacramental prayer on the bread expresses beautifully the nature of our covenant relationship with our Heavenly Father. In the Father’s plan of salvation, we make covenants with our Heavenly Father, but the purposes of the covenants are realized and we qualify for the blessings promised through the Lord Jesus Christ; He is the Mediator. In the sacramental ordinance, we witness to the Father (in effect, making a covenant with Him anew) that we are willing to take upon ourselves the name of Jesus Christ, always remember Him, and keep His commandments, that we might always have His Spirit (the Holy Ghost) to be with us. The gifts in the Father’s promises come through the redeeming and strengthening

power of Jesus Christ. For example, as President Russell M. Nelson has taught, Jesus Christ “is the source of all joy” (see “Joy and Spiritual Survival,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2016, 82). Thus, riveting our focus on Jesus Christ brings joy into our lives no matter our circumstances.

30. President Ezra Taft Benson captured the impact of this change in attitude and orientation when he said, “When obedience ceases to be an irritant and becomes our quest, in that moment God will endow us with power” (in Donald L. Staheli, “Obedience—Life’s Great Challenge,” *Ensign*, May 1998, 82).
31. John 16:32.
32. For additional discussion of the fact of the Father’s and the Son’s concern for, interest in, love for, and involvement in our lives, see Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Grandeur of God,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2003, 70–73; Henry B. Eyring, “Walk with Me,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May

None of us are perfect. Sometimes we get stuck. We get distracted or discouraged. We stumble. But if we look to Jesus Christ with a repentant heart, He will lift us up, cleanse us from sin, forgive us, and heal our hearts. He is patient and kind; His redeeming love never ends and never fails.³³ He will help us live our covenants and magnify our calling as elders in Israel.

And the Father will bless us with all things required to accomplish His purposes— “things ... both in heaven and on the earth, the life and the light, the Spirit and the power, sent forth by the will of the Father through Jesus Christ, his Son.”³⁴

When divine light and power flow into our lives, three miraculous things happen:

First, we can see! Through revelation we begin to see as Jesus saw the woman: beyond the surface into the heart.³⁵ As we see as Jesus sees, He blesses us to love those we serve with His love. With His help, those we serve will see the Savior and feel His love.³⁶

Second, we have priesthood power! We have the authority and the power to act in the name of Jesus Christ “to bless, guide, protect, strengthen, and heal others” and bring miracles to those we love and keep our marriages and families safe.³⁷

2017, 82–85. See also Matthew 18:20; 28:20; Doctrine and Covenants 6:32; 29:5; 38:7; 61:36; 84:88.

33. See Romans 8:35–39; 1 Corinthians 13:1–8; Moroni 7:46–47.

34. Doctrine and Covenants 50:27. Note that the Lord gives to each who is ordained and sent forth this promise that pertains to, and is circumscribed by, the specific assignment given him: “The same is appointed to be the greatest, notwithstanding he is the least and the servant of all. Wherefore, he is possessor of all things; for all things are subject unto him, both in heaven and on the earth, the life and the light, the Spirit and the power, sent forth by the will of the Father through Jesus Christ, his Son. But no man is possessor of all things except he be purified and cleansed from all sin. And if ye are purified and cleansed from all sin, ye shall ask whatsoever you will in

the name of Jesus and it shall be done” (Doctrine and Covenants 50:26–29).

35. See 1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Corinthians 2:14.

For an example of this blessing of seeing as Jesus does, see President Henry B. Eyring’s account of his experience as the bishop of a young man who had committed a crime. The Lord said to then-Bishop Eyring, “I’m going to let you see him as I see him” (“Walk with Me,” 84).

36. This is the promise and the charge the Savior gave the people at the temple at Bountiful. He commanded them to so live that His light and His example would be in them, so that they could hold Him up as the light to the world in their lives and in their invitations to others to come unto Him. As His followers so lived and so invited, others would feel Him and see Him in the Lord’s servants. (See 3 Nephi 18:24–25.)

Third, Jesus Christ goes with us! Where we go, He goes. When we teach, He teaches. When we comfort, He comforts. When we bless, He blesses.³⁷

Brethren, have we not cause to rejoice? We do! We hold the holy priesthood of God. As we look unto Jesus Christ, live our covenants, and rivet our focus on Him, we will join with our sisters and minister in a holier way, gather scattered Israel on both sides of the veil, strengthen and seal our families, and prepare the world for the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. It will happen. I so testify.

I close with this prayer from my heart, that all of us, every one, will look unto Jesus Christ in every thought. Doubt not. Fear not. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

37. See Russell M. Nelson, "The Price of Priesthood Power," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2016, 68.

38. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:88.

The Power of Sustaining Faith

By President Henry B. Eyring
Second Counselor in the First Presidency



By raising your hand to sustain, you make a promise with God, whose servants these are, that you will sustain them.

MANY TIMES I have heard priesthood leaders give thanks for the sustaining faith of those they serve. From the emotion in their voices, you know their gratitude is deep and real. My purpose today is to convey the Lord's appreciation for your sustaining His servants in His Church. And it is also to encourage you to exercise and grow in that power to sustain others with your faith.

Before you were born, you demonstrated such power. Think back to what we know of the spirit world before we were born. Our Heavenly Father presented a plan for His children. We were there. Lucifer, our spirit brother, opposed the plan that would allow us freedom to choose. Jehovah, the Beloved Son of Heavenly Father, sustained the plan. Lucifer led a rebellion. Jehovah's sustaining voice prevailed, and He volunteered to be our Savior.

The fact that you are in mortality now assures us that you sustained the Father and the Savior. It took faith in Jesus Christ to sustain the plan of happiness and Jesus Christ's place in it when you knew so little of the challenges that you would face in mortality.

Your faith to sustain servants of God has been at the heart of your happiness in this life as well. When you accepted a missionary's challenge to pray to know that the Book of

Mormon was the word of God, you had the faith to sustain a servant of the Lord. When you accepted the invitation to be baptized, you sustained a humble servant of God.

When you let someone place hands on your head and say, “Receive the Holy Ghost,” you sustained him as a holder of the Melchizedek Priesthood.

Since that day, you have, by serving faithfully, sustained each person who has conferred the priesthood upon you and each who has ordained you to an office in that priesthood.

Early in your priesthood experience, each sustaining was a simple event of trusting a servant of God. Now, many of you have moved up to a place where to sustain requires more.

You choose whether to sustain all whom the Lord calls — in whatever the Lord has called them. That choice happens in conferences all over the world. It has happened in this one. In such meetings, names of men and women — servants of God — are read, and you are invited to raise your hand to sustain. You can withhold your sustaining vote, or you can pledge your sustaining faith. By raising your hand to sustain, you make a promise. You make a promise with God, whose servants these are, that you will sustain them.

These are imperfect human beings, as are you. Keeping your promises will take unshakable faith that the Lord called them. Keeping those promises will also bring eternal happiness. Not keeping them will bring sorrow to you and to those you love— and even losses beyond your power to imagine.

You may have been asked, or you will be, whether you sustain your bishop, stake president, the General Authorities, and the General Officers of the Church. It may happen as you are asked to sustain officers and leaders in a conference. Sometimes it will be in an interview with a bishop or stake president.

My counsel is that you ask those questions of yourself beforehand, with careful and prayerful thought. As you do, you might look back on your recent thoughts, words, and deeds. Try to remember and frame the answers you will give when the Lord interviews you, knowing that someday He will. You could prepare by asking yourself questions like the following:

1. Have I thought or spoken of human weakness in the people I have pledged to sustain?
2. Have I looked for evidence that the Lord is leading them?
3. Have I conscientiously and loyally followed their leadership?
4. Have I spoken about the evidence I can see that they are God's servants?
5. Do I pray for them regularly by name and with feelings of love?

Those questions will, for most of us, lead to some uneasiness and a need to repent. We are commanded by God not to judge others unrighteously, but in practice, we find that hard to avoid. Almost everything we do in working with people leads us to evaluate them. And in almost every aspect of our lives, we compare ourselves with others. We may do so for many reasons, some of them reasonable, but it often leads us to be critical.

President George Q. Cannon gave a warning that I pass on to you as my own. I believe he spoke the truth: "God has chosen His servants. He claims it as His prerogative to condemn them, if they need condemnation. He has not given it to us individually to censure and condemn them. No man, however strong he may be in the faith, however high in the Priesthood, can speak evil of the Lord's anointed and find fault with God's authority on the earth without incurring His displeasure. The Holy Spirit will withdraw himself from such a man, and he will go into darkness. This being the case, do you not see how important it is that we should be careful?"¹

My observation is that the members of the Church across the world are generally loyal to each other and to those who preside over them. There are, however, improvements we could and must make. We could rise higher in our power to sustain each other. It will take faith and effort. Here are four suggestions I make for us to act on at this conference.

1. Gospel Truth: Discourses and Writings of President George Q. Cannon, ed. Jerreld L. Newquist (1974), 1:278.

1. We could identify specific actions the speakers recommend and start today to carry them out. As we do, our power to sustain them will increase.
2. We could pray for them as they speak that the Holy Ghost will carry their words into the hearts of specific people we love. When we learn later that our prayer was answered, our power to sustain those leaders will increase.
3. We could pray that specific speakers will be blessed and magnified as they give their messages. When we see that they were magnified, we will grow in our faith to sustain them, and it will endure.
4. We could listen for messages from the speakers that come as an answer to our personal prayers for help. When the answers come, and they will, we will grow in our faith to sustain all the Lord's servants.

In addition to improving in sustaining those who serve in the Church, we will learn that there is another setting in which we can increase in such power. There, it can bring even greater blessings to us. It is in the home and family.

I speak to the younger priesthood holder who lives in a home with his father. Let me tell you from my own experience what it means for a father to feel your sustaining faith. He may look confident to you. But he faces more challenges than you know. At times he can't see the way through the problems before him.

Your admiration for him will help him some. Your love for him will help even more. But the thing that will help the most is sincere words like these: "Dad, I've prayed for you, and I have felt that the Lord is going to help you. Everything will work out. I know it will."

Words such as those also have power in the other direction, father to son. When a son has made a serious mistake, perhaps in a spiritual matter, he may feel that he has failed. As his father, in that moment, you may be surprised when, after you pray to know what to do, the Holy Ghost puts these words into your mouth: "Son, I'm with you all the way. The Lord loves you. With His help, you can make it back. I know that you can and that you will. I love you."

In the priesthood quorum and in the family, increased faith to sustain each other is the way we build the Zion the Lord wants us to create. With His help, we can and we will. It will take learning to love the Lord with all our heart, might, mind, and strength and to love each other as we love ourselves.

As we grow in that pure love of Christ, our hearts soften. That love will humble us and lead us to repent. Our confidence in the Lord and in each other will grow. And then we will move toward becoming one, as the Lord promises we can.²

I testify that Heavenly Father knows and loves you. Jesus is the living Christ. This is His Church. We hold His priesthood. He will honor our efforts to grow in our power to exercise it and to sustain each other. I so witness in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

2. See Doctrine and Covenants 35:2.

Where Will This Lead?

By President Dallin H. Oaks
First Counselor in the First Presidency



We make better choices and decisions if we look at the alternatives and ponder where they will lead.

THE RESTORED GOSPEL of Jesus Christ encourages us to think about the future. It explains the purpose of mortal life and the reality of the life to follow. It teaches great ideas about the future to guide our actions today.

In contrast, we all know persons who are concerned only with the present: spend it today, enjoy it today, and take no thought for the future.

Our present and our future will be happier if we are always conscious of the future. As we make current decisions, we should always be asking, “Where will this lead?”

I.

Some decisions are choices between doing something or doing nothing. I heard an example of this kind of choice at a stake conference in the United States many years ago.

The setting was a beautiful college campus. A crowd of young students was seated on the grass. The speaker who described this circumstance said they were watching a handsome tree squirrel with a large, bushy tail playing around the base of a beautiful hardwood tree. Sometimes it was on the ground, sometimes up and down and around the trunk. But why would that familiar sight attract a crowd of students?

Stretched out prone on the grass nearby was an Irish setter. He was the object of the students' interest, and the squirrel was the object of his. Each time the squirrel was momentarily out of sight circling the tree, the setter would quietly creep forward a few inches and then resume his apparently indifferent posture. This was what held the students' interest. Silent and immobile, their eyes were riveted on the event whose outcome was increasingly obvious.

Finally, the setter was close enough to bound at the squirrel and catch it in his mouth. A gasp of horror arose, and the crowd of students surged forward and wrested the little animal away from the dog, but it was too late. The squirrel was dead.

Anyone in that crowd could have warned the squirrel at any time by waving his or her arms or crying out, but none did. They just watched while the inevitable outcome got closer and closer. No one asked, "Where will this lead?" When the predictable occurred, all rushed to prevent the outcome, but it was too late. Tearful regret was all they could offer.

That true story is a parable of sorts. It applies to things we see in our own lives and in lives and circumstances around us. As we see threats creeping up on persons or things we love, we have the choice of speaking or acting or remaining silent. It is well to ask ourselves, "Where will this lead?" Where the consequences are immediate and serious, we cannot afford to do nothing. We must sound appropriate warnings or support appropriate preventive efforts while there is still time.

The decisions I have just described involve choices between taking some action or taking no action at all. More common are those choices between one action or another. These include choices between good or evil, but more frequently they are choices between two goods. Here too it is desirable to ask where this will lead. We make many choices between two goods, often involving how we will spend our time. There is nothing bad about playing video games or texting or watching TV or talking on a cell phone. But each of these involves what is called "opportunity cost," meaning that if we spend time doing one thing, we lose the opportunity to do another. I am sure you can see that we

need to measure thoughtfully what we are losing by the time we spend on one activity, even if it is perfectly good in itself.

Some time ago I gave a talk titled “Good, Better, Best.” In that talk I said that “just because something is *good* is not a sufficient reason for doing it. The number of good things we can do far exceeds the time available to accomplish them. Some things are better than good, and these are the things that should command priority attention in our lives. ... We have to forego some good things in order to choose others that are better or best.”¹

Take the long view. What is the effect on our future of the decisions we make in the present? Remember the importance of getting an education, studying the gospel, renewing our covenants by partaking of the sacrament, and attending the temple.

II.

“Where will this lead?” is also important in choosing how we label or think of ourselves. Most important, each of us is a child of God with a potential destiny of eternal life. Every other label, even including occupation, race, physical characteristics, or honors, is temporary or trivial in eternal terms. Don’t choose to label yourselves or think of yourselves in terms that put a limit on a goal for which you might strive.

My brethren, and my sisters who may view or read what I say here, I hope you know why your leaders give the teachings and counsel we give. We love you, and our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, love you. Their plan for us is the “great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8). That plan and Their commandments and ordinances and covenants lead us to the greatest happiness and joy in this life and in the life to come. As servants of the Father and the Son, we teach and counsel as They have directed us by the Holy Ghost. We have no desire other than to speak what is true and to encourage you to do what They have

1. Dallin H. Oaks, “Good, Better, Best,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2007, 104, 107

outlined as the pathway to eternal life, “the greatest of all the gifts of God” (Doctrine and Covenants 14:7).

III.

Here is another example of the effect on the future of decisions made in the present. This example concerns the choice to make a present sacrifice to achieve an important future goal.

At a stake conference in Cali, Colombia, a sister told how she and her fiancé desired to be married in the temple, but at that time the closest temple was in faraway Peru. For a long time, they saved their money for the bus fares. Finally they boarded the bus to Bogotá, but when they arrived there, they learned that all seats on the bus to Lima, Peru, were taken. They could go home without being married or be married out of the temple. Fortunately, there was one other alternative. They could ride on the bus to Lima if they were willing to sit on the floor of the bus for the entire five-day and five-night ride. They chose to do this. She said it was difficult, even though some riders sometimes let them sit in their seats so they could stretch out on the floor.

What impressed me in her talk was this sister’s statement that she was grateful she and her husband had been able to go to the temple in this way, because it changed the way they felt about the gospel and the way they felt about marriage in the temple. The Lord had rewarded them with the growth that comes from sacrifice. She also observed that their five-day trip to the temple accomplished a great deal more in building their spirituality than many visits to the temple that were sacrifice-free.

In the years since I heard that testimony, I have wondered how different that young couple’s life would have been if they had made another choice — forgoing the sacrifice necessary to be married in the temple.

Brethren, we make countless choices in life, some large and some seemingly small. Looking back, we can see what a great

2. See Russell M. Nelson, “As We Go Forward Together,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Apr. 2018, 7.

difference some of our choices made in our lives. We make better choices and decisions if we look at the alternatives and ponder where they will lead. As we do, we will be following President Russell M. Nelson's counsel to begin with the end in mind.² For us, the end is always on the covenant path through the temple to eternal life, the greatest of all the gifts of God.

I testify of Jesus Christ and of the effects of His Atonement and the other truths of His everlasting gospel in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

We Can Do Better and Be Better

By President Russell M. Nelson



Make your focus on daily repentance so integral to your life that you can exercise the priesthood with greater power than ever before.

MY DEAR BRETHREN, it is inspiring to look out over this vast congregation of the Lord's battalion of priesthood bearers. What a mighty force for good you are! We love you. We pray for you. And we are most grateful for you.

Recently I have found myself drawn to the Lord's instruction given through the Prophet Joseph Smith: "Say nothing but repentance unto this generation."¹ This declaration is often repeated throughout scripture.² It prompts an obvious question: "Does *everyone* need to repent?" The answer is yes.

Too many people consider repentance as punishment—something to be avoided except in the most serious circumstances. But this feeling of being penalized is engendered by Satan. He tries to block us from looking to Jesus Christ,³ who stands with open arms,⁴ hoping and willing to heal, forgive, cleanse, strengthen, purify, and sanctify us.

The word for *repentance* in the Greek New Testament is *metanoeo*. The prefix *meta-* means "change." The suffix *-noeo* is related to Greek words that mean "mind," "knowledge," "spirit," and "breath."⁵

1. Doctrine and Covenants 6:9; 11:9.

2. See Mark 1:4; Mosiah 18:20; Alma 37:33; 3 Nephi 7:23; Moroni 3:3; Doctrine and Covenants 19:21; 44:3; 55:2.

3. See Doctrine and Covenants 6:36.

4. See Deuteronomy 26:8; 2 Nephi 1:15; Mormon 6:17; Doctrine and Covenants 6:20.

5. See Russell M. Nelson, "Repentance and Conversion," *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2007, 103.

Thus, when Jesus asks you and me to “repent,”⁶ He is inviting us to change our mind, our knowledge, our spirit — even the way we breathe. He is asking us to change the way we love, think, serve, spend our time, treat our wives, teach our children, and even care for our bodies.

Nothing is more liberating, more ennobling, or more crucial to our individual progression than is a regular, daily focus on repentance. Repentance is not an event; it is a process. It is the key to happiness and peace of mind. When coupled with faith, repentance opens our access to the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.⁷

Whether you are diligently moving along the covenant path, have slipped or stepped from the covenant path, or can’t even see the path from where you are now, I plead with you to repent. Experience the strengthening power of daily repentance — of doing and being a little better each day.

When we choose to repent, we choose to change! We allow the Savior to transform us into the best version of ourselves. We choose to grow spiritually and receive joy — the joy of redemption in Him.⁸ When we choose to repent, we choose to become more like Jesus Christ!⁹

Brethren, we need to *do* better and *be* better because we are in a battle. The battle with sin is real. The adversary is quadrupling his efforts to disrupt testimonies and impede the work of the Lord. He is arming his minions with potent weapons to keep us from partaking of the joy and love of the Lord.¹⁰

Repentance is the key to avoiding misery inflicted by traps of the adversary. The Lord does not expect perfection from us at this point in our eternal progression. But He does expect us to become increasingly pure. Daily repentance is the pathway to purity, and purity brings power. Personal purity can make us powerful tools in the hands of God. Our repentance — our purity — will empower us to help in the gathering of Israel.

6. See, for example, Luke 13:3, 5.

7. See 2 Nephi 9:23; Mosiah 4:6; 3 Nephi 9:22; 27:19.

8. See Russell M. Nelson, “Repentance and Conversion,” 103–4.

9. See 3 Nephi 27:27.

10. See Jude 1:17–21; 2 Nephi 2:25, 27; 28:20; see also 1 Nephi 8:10–12, 21–23; 11:21–22; 12:17; Doctrine and Covenants 10:22; Moses 5:13.

The Lord taught the Prophet Joseph Smith “that the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness.”¹¹

We know what will give us greater access to the powers of heaven. We also know what will hinder our progress— what we need to stop doing to increase our access to the powers of heaven. Brethren, prayerfully seek to understand what stands in the way of your repentance. Identify what stops you from repenting. And then, change! Repent! All of us can do better and be better than ever before.¹²

There are specific ways in which we can likely improve. One is in the way we treat our bodies. I stand in awe of the miracle of the human body. It is a magnificent creation, essential to our gradual ascent toward our ultimate divine potential. We cannot progress without it. In giving us the gift of a body, God has allowed us to take a vital step toward becoming more like Him.

Satan understands this. He chafes at the fact that his premortal apostasy permanently disqualifies him from this privilege, leaving him in a constant state of jealousy and resentment. Thus many, if not most, of the temptations he puts in our path cause us to abuse our bodies or the bodies of others. Because Satan is miserable *without* a body, he wants us to be miserable *because* of ours.¹³

Your body is your personal temple, created to house your eternal spirit.¹⁴ Your care of that temple is important. Now, I ask you, brethren, are you more interested in dressing and grooming your body to appeal to the world than to please God? Your answer to this question sends a direct message to Him about

11. Doctrine and Covenants 121:36.

12. The words the Lord has inspired in the revelations and in present-day teachings— higher, holier, accelerate, increase, strengthen, greater, transform, remodel, improve, enhance, change, deepen, stretch— are words of spiritual growth (see Russell M. Nelson, “Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 113–14).

13. We know that “men are free according to the flesh. ... They are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself” (2 Nephi 2:27).

14. See 1 Corinthians 3:16–17; 6:18–20.

your feelings regarding His transcendent gift to you. In this reverence for our bodies, brethren, I think we can do better and be better.

Another way we can also do better and be better is how we honor the women in our lives, beginning with our wives and daughters, our mothers and sisters.¹⁵

Months ago, I received a heartbreaking letter from a dear sister. She wrote: “[My daughters and I] feel we are in fierce competition for our husbands’ and sons’ undivided attention, with 24/7 sports updates, video games, stock market updates, [and] endless analyzing and watching of games of every [conceivable] sport. It feels like we’re losing our front-row seats with our husbands and sons because of their permanent front-row seats with [sports and games].”¹⁶

Brethren, your first and foremost duty as a bearer of the priesthood is to love and care for your wife. Become one with her. Be her partner. Make it easy for her to want to be yours. No other interest in life should take priority over building an eternal relationship with her. Nothing on TV, a mobile device, or a computer is more important than her well-being. Take an inventory of how you spend your time and where you devote your energy. That will tell you where your heart is. Pray to have your heart attuned to your wife’s heart. Seek to bring her joy. Seek her counsel, and listen. Her input will improve your output.

If you have a need to repent because of the way you have treated the women closest to you, begin now. And remember that it is your responsibility to help the women in your life receive the blessings that derive from living the Lord’s law of chastity. Never be the reason that a woman is unable to receive her temple blessings.

Brethren, we all need to repent. We need to get up off the couch, put down the remote, and wake up from our spiritual slumber. It is time to put on the full armor of God so we can engage in the most important work on earth. It is time to “thrust in [our] sickles, and reap with all [our] might, mind, and strength.”¹⁷ The forces

15. See Jacob 2:35.

16. Letter received Feb. 4, 2019.

17. Doctrine and Covenants 33:7.

of evil have never raged more forcefully than they do today. As servants of the Lord, we cannot be asleep while this battle rages.

Your family needs your leadership and love. Your quorum and those in your ward or branch need your strength. And all who meet you need to know what a true disciple of the Lord looks like and acts like.

My dear brethren, you were chosen by our Father to come to earth at this crucial time because of your premortal spiritual valor. You are among the finest, most valiant men who have ever come to the earth. Satan knows who you are and who you were premortally, and he understands the work that must be done before the Savior returns. And after millennia of practicing his cunning arts, the adversary is experienced and incorrigible.

Gratefully, the priesthood we hold is far stronger than are the wiles of the adversary. I plead with you to be the men and young men the Lord needs you to be. Make your focus on daily repentance so integral to your life that you can exercise the priesthood with greater power than ever before. This is the only way you will keep yourself and your family spiritually safe in the challenging days ahead.

The Lord needs selfless men who put the welfare of others ahead of their own. He needs men who intentionally work to hear the voice of the Spirit with clarity. He needs men of the covenant who keep their covenants with integrity. He needs men who are determined to keep themselves sexually pure—worthy men who can be called upon at a moment's notice to give blessings with pure hearts, clean minds, and willing hands. The Lord needs men eager to repent—men with a zeal to serve and be part of the Lord's battalion of worthy priesthood bearers.

I bless you to become those men. I bless you with the courage to repent daily and learn how to exercise full priesthood power. I bless you to communicate the love of the Savior to your wife and children and to all who know you. I bless you to *do* better and *be* better. And I bless you that as you make these efforts, you will experience miracles in your life.

We are engaged in the work of Almighty God. Jesus is the Christ. We are Their servants. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Abound with Blessings

By Elder Dale G. Renlund
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



Most blessings that God desires to give us require action on our part — action based on our faith in Jesus Christ.

MY DEAR BROTHERS and sisters, our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ desire to bless each of us.¹ The question of how to access and obtain those blessings has been the subject of theological debate and discussion for centuries.² Some contend that blessings are completely earned; we receive them only through our works. Others argue that God has already chosen who He will bless and how — and that these determinations are unchangeable. Both positions are fundamentally flawed. Blessings from heaven are neither earned by frenetically accruing “good deed coupons” nor by helplessly waiting to see if we win the blessing lottery. No, the truth is much more nuanced but more appropriate for the relationship between a loving Heavenly Father and His potential heirs — us. Restored truth reveals that blessings are never earned, but faith-inspired actions on our part, both initial and ongoing, are essential.³

1. See Doctrine and Covenants 41:1; 78:17; 104:33.

2. See, for instance, Craig Harline, *A World Ablaze: The Rise of Martin Luther and the Birth of the Reformation* (2017), 20. One such debate was between Augustine (AD 354–430) and his rival Pelagius (AD 354–420). Pelagius maintained that “humans certainly [had] it inside them to do good, and that they earned God’s grace by acting on that goodness and keeping all of God’s commandments.”

Augustine vehemently disagreed. See also Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World* (2017), 296. Luther taught that works could never lead to God’s grace; faith leads to grace and good works follow; “it is impossible to separate works from faith, quite as impossible as to separate heat and light from fire.”

3. See Doctrine and Covenants 82:10.

As we consider how we receive blessings from God, let us liken heavenly blessings to a massive pile of wood. Imagine at the center a small mound of kindling, topped by a layer of wood chips. Sticks come next, then small logs, and finally huge logs. This woodpile contains an enormous amount of fuel, capable of producing light and heat for days. Envision next to the woodpile a single match, the kind with a phosphorus tip.⁴

For the energy in the woodpile to be released, the match needs to be struck and the kindling lit. The kindling will quickly catch fire and cause the larger pieces of wood to burn. Once this combustion reaction starts, it continues until all the wood is burned or the fire is deprived of oxygen.

Striking the match and lighting the kindling are small actions that enable the potential energy of the wood to be released.⁵ Until the match is struck, nothing happens, regardless of the size of the woodpile. If the match is struck but not applied to the kindling, the amount of light and heat released from the match alone is miniscule and the combustion energy in the wood remains unreleased. If oxygen is not supplied at any point, the combustion reaction stops.

In a similar way, most blessings that God desires to give us require action on our part — action based on our faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in the Savior is a principle of action and of power.⁶ First we act in faith; then the power comes — according to God’s will and timing. The sequence is crucial.⁷ The required action, though, is always tiny when compared to the blessings we ultimately receive.⁸

Consider what happened when fiery, flying serpents came among the ancient Israelites on their way to the promised land. The bite of a poisonous serpent was fatal. But a bitten individual could be healed by looking at a brass serpent fashioned by Moses and placed on a pole.⁹ How much energy does it take

4. This is a camping match, a “strike anywhere” match. Modern safety matches, like kitchen matches, have the phosphorous on the strike strip rather than on the match tip.
5. These actions constitute the “activation energy” for the blaze.

The term “activation energy” was introduced in 1889 by the Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius.

6. See Lectures on Faith (1985), 3.
7. See David A. Bednar, “Ask in Faith,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2008, 94.
8. See Mosiah 2:24–25.

to look at something? All who looked accessed the powers of heaven and were healed. Other Israelites who were bitten failed to look at the brazen serpent and died. Perhaps they lacked the faith to look.¹⁰ Perhaps they did not believe that such a simple action could trigger the promised healing. Or perhaps they willfully hardened their hearts and rejected the counsel of God's prophet.¹¹

The principle of activating blessings that flow from God is eternal. Like those ancient Israelites, we too must act on our faith in Jesus Christ to be blessed. God has revealed that "there is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated — and when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated."¹² That being said, you do not earn a blessing — that notion is false — but you do have to qualify for it. Our salvation comes only through the merits and grace of Jesus Christ.¹³ The immensity of His atoning sacrifice means that the woodpile is infinite; our puny actions approach zero in comparison. But they are not zero, and they are not insignificant; in the dark, a match that is lit can be seen for miles. In fact, it can be seen in heaven because small acts of faith are required to ignite God's promises.¹⁴

To receive a desired blessing from God, act with faith, striking the metaphorical match on which the heavenly blessing is contingent. For example, one of the objects of prayer is to secure blessings that God is willing to grant but that are made conditional on our asking.¹⁵ Alma cried out for mercy, and his pains resolved; he was no longer harrowed up by the memory of his sins. His joy overwhelmed his pain — all because he cried out with faith in Jesus Christ.¹⁶ The activation energy needed for us is to have enough faith in Christ to sincerely ask God in prayer and accept His will and timing for the answer.

9. See Numbers 21:6–9.

10. See 1 Nephi 17:41.

11. See 1 Nephi 17:42.

12. Doctrine and Covenants 130:20–21.

13. See 2 Nephi 10:24; 25:23.

14. See Alma 60:11, 21; Dallin H. Oaks, "Small and Simple Things," *Ensign* or

Liahona, May 2018, 89–92; M. Russell Ballard, "Be Anxiously Engaged," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2012, 29–31.

15. See Bible Dictionary, "Prayer"; see also Moroni 7:48.

16. See Alma 36:18–21; see also Enos 1:5–8.

Often, the activation energy needed for blessings requires more than just looking or asking; ongoing, repeated, faith-filled actions are required. In the middle of the 19th century, Brigham Young directed a group of Latter-day Saints to explore and settle Arizona, an arid region in North America. After reaching Arizona, the group ran out of water and feared they would perish. They pled with God for help. Soon rain and snow fell, allowing them to fill their barrels with water and provide for their livestock. Grateful and refreshed, they returned to Salt Lake City rejoicing in the goodness of God. Upon their return, they reported the details of their expedition to Brigham Young and pronounced their conclusion that Arizona was uninhabitable.

After listening to the report, Brigham Young asked a man in the room what he thought about the expedition and the miracle. That man, Daniel W. Jones, tersely replied, “I would have filled up, went on, and prayed again.” Brother Brigham put his hand on Brother Jones and said, “This is the man that shall take charge of the next trip to Arizona.”¹⁷

We can all recall times when we have pushed on and prayed again — and blessings resulted. The experiences of Michael and Marian Holmes illustrate these principles. Michael and I served together as Area Seventies. I was always thrilled whenever he was called on to pray in our meetings because his deep spirituality was readily apparent; he knew how to speak with God. I loved to hear him pray. Early in their marriage, though, Michael and Marian were not praying or attending church. They were busy with three little children and a successful construction company. Michael did not feel that he was a religious man. One evening, their bishop came to their home and encouraged them to begin praying.

After the bishop left, Michael and Marian decided that they would try to pray. Before going to bed, they knelt at their bedside and, uncomfortably, Michael began. After a few awkward words of prayer, Michael abruptly stopped, saying,

17. Daniel W. Jones, *40 Years Among the Indians* (1960), 222.

“Marian, I can’t do this.” As he stood and began walking away, Marian grabbed him by the hand, dragged him back to his knees, and said, “Mike, you can do this. Try again!” With this encouragement, Michael finished a short prayer.

The Holmeses began to pray regularly. They accepted a neighbor’s invitation to attend church. As they walked into the chapel and heard the opening hymn, the Spirit whispered to them, “This is true.” Later, unseen and unasked, Michael helped haul some trash from the meetinghouse. As he did, he felt a distinct impression, “This is My house.”

Michael and Marian accepted Church callings and served in their ward and stake. They were sealed to each other, and their 3 children were sealed to them. More children followed, bringing the total to 12. The Holmeses served as mission president and companion — twice.

The first clunky prayer was a small but faith-filled action that triggered the blessings of heaven. The Holmeses fed the flames of faith by attending church and serving. Their dedicated discipleship over the years has led to a raging inferno that inspires to this day.

A fire, however, must receive a constant supply of oxygen for the wood to ultimately release its full potential. As demonstrated by Michael and Marian Holmes, faith in Christ requires ongoing action for the blaze to continue. Small actions fuel our ability to walk along the covenant path and lead to the greatest blessings God can offer. But oxygen flows only if we figuratively keep moving our feet. Sometimes we need to make a bow and arrow before revelation comes as to where we should search for food.¹⁸ Sometimes we need to make tools before revelations come as to how to build a ship.¹⁹ Sometimes, at the direction of the Lord’s prophet, we need to bake a small cake from the little oil and flour we have to receive an unfailing cruse of oil and barrel of flour.²⁰ And sometimes we need to “be still and know that [God is] God” and trust in His timing.²¹

18. See 1 Nephi 16:23.

19. See 1 Nephi 17:9.

20. See 1 Kings 17:10–16.

21. Doctrine and Covenants 101:16.

When you receive any blessing from God, you can conclude that you have complied with an eternal law governing reception of that blessing.²² But remember that the “irrevocably decreed” law is time insensitive, meaning blessings come on God’s timetable. Even ancient prophets in search of their heavenly home²³ “died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off ... [and] were persuaded ... and embraced them.”²⁴ If a desired blessing from God has not been received — yet — you do not need to go crazy, wondering what more you need to do. Instead, heed Joseph Smith’s counsel to “cheerfully do all things that lie in [your] power; and then ... stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the ... arm [of God] ... revealed.”²⁵ Some blessings are reserved for later, even for the most valiant of God’s children.²⁶

Six months ago a home-centered, Church-supported plan to learn doctrine, strengthen faith, and fortify individuals and families was introduced. President Russell M. Nelson promised that the changes can help us survive spiritually, increase our gospel joy, and deepen our conversion to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.²⁷ But it is up to us to claim these blessings. We are each responsible to open and study *Come, Follow Me — For Individuals and Families*, along with the scriptures and other *Come, Follow Me* material.²⁸ We need to discuss them with our family and friends and organize our Sabbath day to light a metaphorical fire. Or we can leave the resources sitting in a pile in our homes with the potential energy trapped inside.

I invite you to faithfully activate heavenly power to receive specific blessings from God. Exercise the faith to strike the match and light the fire. Supply the needed oxygen while you patiently wait on the Lord. With these invitations, I pray that the

22. See Doctrine and Covenants 130:20–21.

23. See Hebrews 11:16.

24. Hebrews 11:13.

25. Doctrine and Covenants 123:17.

26. See Jeffrey R. Holland, “An High Priest of Good Things to Come,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 36–38; *Liahona*, Jan. 2000, 42–45. Elder Holland said, “Some blessings come soon, some come late, and some don’t come until heaven; but

for those who embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ, they come.”

27. See Russell M. Nelson, “Opening Remarks,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 6–8.

28. See Quentin L. Cook, “Deep and Lasting Conversion to Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 8–12.

29. Proverbs 28:20.

Holy Ghost will guide and direct you so that you, like the faithful person described in Proverbs, will “abound with blessings.”²⁹ I testify that your Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, live, are concerned with your welfare, and delight to bless you, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Christ: The Light That Shines in Darkness

By Sharon Eubank
First Counselor in the Relief Society General Presidency



If you feel that the beacon of your testimony is sputtering and darkness is closing in, take courage. Keep your promises to God.

MY OFFICE IN the Relief Society Building has a perfect view of the Salt Lake Temple. Every night, as regular as clockwork, the outdoor temple lights turn on at dusk. The temple is a steady, reassuring beacon just outside my window.

One night this past February, my office remained exceptionally dim as the sun went down. As I looked out the window, the temple was dark. The lights had not turned on. I felt suddenly somber. I couldn't see the temple spires I had glimpsed every evening for years.

Seeing darkness where I expected to see light reminded me that one of the fundamental needs we have in order to grow is to stay connected to our source of light — Jesus Christ. He is the source of our power, the Light and Life of the World. Without a strong connection to Him, we begin to spiritually die. Knowing that, Satan tries to exploit the worldly pressures we all face. He works to dim our light, short-circuit the connection, cut off the power supply, leaving us alone in the dark. These pressures are common conditions in mortality, but Satan works hard to isolate us and tell us we are the only one experiencing them.

Some of Us Are Paralyzed with Grief

When tragedies overtake us, when life hurts so much we can't breathe, when we've taken a beating like the man on the road to Jericho and been left for dead, Jesus comes along and pours oil into our wounds, lifts us tenderly up, takes us to an inn, looks after us.¹ To those of us in grief, He says, "I will ... ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs, ... that ye may know of a surety that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions."²

Christ heals wounds.

Some of Us Are Just So Tired

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said: "It is not intended that we run faster than we have strength. ... But [in spite of] that, I know ... many of you run [very,] very fast and that [the] energy and emotional supply sometimes registers close to empty."³ When expectations overwhelm us, we can step back and ask Heavenly Father what to let go of. Part of our life experience is learning what not to do. But even so, sometimes life can be exhausting. Jesus assures us, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."⁴

Christ is willing to join with us in the yoke and pull in order to lighten our burdens. **Christ is rest.**

Some of Us Feel We Don't Fit the Traditional Mold

For various reasons, we don't feel accepted or acceptable. The New Testament shows the great efforts Jesus made to reach out to all kinds of people: lepers, tax collectors, children, Galileans, harlots, women, Pharisees, sinners, Samaritans, widows, Roman soldiers, adulterers, the ritually unclean. In almost every story, He is reaching someone who wasn't traditionally accepted in society.

Luke 19 tells the story of the chief tax collector in Jericho named Zacchaeus. He climbed a tree in order to see Jesus walk by. Zacchaeus was employed by the Roman government and

1. See Luke 10:30–35.

2. Mosiah 24:14.

3. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Bearing One Another's Burdens," *Ensign*, June 2018, 28; *Liahona*, June 2018, 30.

4. Matthew 11:28.

viewed as corrupt and a sinner. Jesus saw him up in the tree and called to him, saying, “Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house.”⁵ And when Jesus saw the goodness of Zacchaeus’s heart and the things he did for others, He accepted his offering, saying, “This day is salvation come to this house, [for] he also is a son of Abraham.”⁶

Christ tenderly told the Nephites, “I have commanded that none of you should go away.”⁷ Peter had that powerful epiphany in Acts 10 when he declared, “God hath shewed me that I should not call any [person] common or unclean.”⁸ It is an unwavering requirement of Christian disciples and Latter-day Saints to show true love to one another.⁹ Jesus extends the same kind of invitation to us that He did to Zacchaeus: “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if [you] hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to [you], and will sup with [you], and [you] with me.”¹⁰

Christ sees us in our tree.

Some of Us Are Splintering with Questions

Not many years ago, I was weighed down and irritated with questions I could not find answers to. Early one Saturday morning, I had a little dream. In the dream I could see a gazebo, and I understood that I should go stand in it. It had five arches encircling it, but the windows were made of stone. I complained in the dream, not wanting to go inside because it was so claustrophobic. Then the thought came into my mind that the brother of Jared had patiently melted stones into clear glass. Glass is stone that has undergone a state change. When the Lord touched the stones for the brother of Jared, they glowed with light in the dark ships.¹¹ Suddenly I was filled with a desire to be in that gazebo more than any other place. It was the very place — the only place — for me to truly “see.” The questions that were bothering me didn’t go away, but brighter in my mind was the question after I woke up: “How are you going to increase your faith, like the brother of Jared, so your stones can be turned into light?”¹²

5. Luke 19:5.

6. Luke 19:9.

7. 3 Nephi 18:25.

8. Acts 10:28.

9. See John 15:12.

10. Revelation 3:20.

11. See Ether 6:3.

12. See Ether 4:7.

Our mortal brains are made to seek understanding and meaning in tidy bundles. I don't know all the reasons why the veil over mortality is so thick. This is not the stage in our eternal development where we have all answers. It is the stage where we develop our assurance (or sometimes our hope) in the evidence of things not seen. Assurance comes in ways that aren't always easy to analyze, but there is light in our darkness. Jesus said, "I am the light, and the life, and the truth of the world."¹³ For those seeking truth, it may seem at first to be the foolish claustrophobia of windows made of stone. But with patience and faithful questions, Jesus can transform our windows of stone to glass and light.

Christ is light to see.

Some of Us Feel We Can Never Be Good Enough

The scarlet dye of the Old Testament was not only colorful but also colorfast, meaning that its vivid color stuck to the wool and would not fade no matter how many times it was washed.¹⁴ Satan wields this reasoning like a club: white wool stained scarlet can never go back to being white. But Jesus Christ declares, "My ways [are] higher than your ways,"¹⁵ and the miracle of His grace is that when we repent of our sins, His scarlet blood returns us to purity. It isn't logical, but it is nevertheless true.

"Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."¹⁶ The Lord says emphatically: he or she "who has repented of ... sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more."¹⁷ In essence: Come, let us reason together.¹⁸ You made mistakes; all come short.¹⁹ Come unto me and repent.²⁰ I will remember the sin no more.²¹ You can be whole again.²² I have a work for you to do.²³

Christ makes wool white.

13. Ether 4:12.

14. See "Scarlet, Crimson, Snow, and Wool," *Ensign*, Dec. 2016, 64–65.

15. Isaiah 55:9.

16. Isaiah 1:18.

17. Doctrine and Covenants 58:42.

18. See Isaiah 1:18.

19. See Romans 3:23.

20. See 3 Nephi 9:22.

21. See Doctrine and Covenants 58:42.

22. See Luke 8:48.

23. See Moses 1:6.

But what are the practical steps? What is the key to reconnecting to the power of Jesus Christ when we are flickering? President Russell M. Nelson said it very simply: “The key is to make and keep sacred covenants. ... It is not a complicated way.”²⁴ Make Christ the center of your life.²⁵

If you feel that the beacon of your testimony is sputtering and darkness is closing in, take courage. Keep your promises to God. Ask your questions. Patiently melt stone to glass. Turn to Jesus Christ, who loves you still.

Jesus said, “I am the light [that] shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not.”²⁶ That means no matter how hard it tries, the darkness cannot put out that light. Ever. You can trust that His light will be there for you.

We, or people we love, may temporarily go dark. In the case of the Salt Lake Temple, the facilities manager, Brother Val White, got a call almost immediately. People had noticed. What was wrong with the temple lights? First, the staff went in person to every electrical panel in the temple and manually turned the lights back on. Then they replaced the batteries in the automatic power supply and tested them to find out what had failed.

It’s hard to get the lights back on by yourself. We need friends. We need each other. Just like the temple facilities staff, we can help each other by showing up in person, recharging our spiritual batteries, repairing what went wrong.

Our individual light may be like only one light bulb on a tree. But we still shine our small light, and all together, like Temple Square at Christmastime, we attract millions of people to the house of the Lord. Best of all, as President Nelson has encouraged, we can bring the Savior’s light to ourselves and the people important to us by the simple act of keeping our covenants. In a variety of ways, the Lord rewards that faithful act with power and with joy.²⁷

24. Russell M. Nelson, “Four Gifts That Jesus Christ Offers to You” (First Presidency Christmas devotional, Dec. 2, 2018), broadcasts. ChurchofJesusChrist.org.

25. See Russell M. Nelson, “Why Have

Faith Now? LDS President Russell M. Nelson Explains during Phoenix-Area Visit,” *Arizona Republic*, Feb. 10, 2019, azcentral.com.

26. Doctrine and Covenants 6:21.

27. See Mosiah 27:14.

I testify you are beloved. The Lord knows how hard you are trying. You are making progress. Keep going. He sees all your hidden sacrifices and counts them to your good and the good of those you love. Your work is not in vain. You are not alone. His very name, Emmanuel, means “God with us.”²⁸ He is surely with you.

Take a few more steps on the covenant path, even if it’s too dark to see very far. The lights will come back on. I testify of the truth in Jesus’s words, and they are filled with light: “Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you; seek me diligently and ye shall find me; ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”²⁹ In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

28. Matthew 1:23.

29. Doctrine and Covenants 88:63.

Great Love for Our Father's Children

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



Love is the primary attribute and motive for the spiritual purposes we were charged to undertake by our beloved prophet.

MY DEAR BROTHERS and sisters, this is a unique and pivotal time in history. We are blessed to live in the last dispensation before the Second Coming of the Savior. Near the commencement of this dispensation, in 1829, the year before the Church was formally organized, a beloved revelation was received, declaring that “a marvelous work” was “about to come forth.” This revelation established that those who desired to serve God qualify for such service through “faith, hope, charity and love, with an eye single to the glory of God.”¹ Charity, which is “the pure love of Christ,”² includes God’s eternal love for all His children.³

My purpose this morning is to emphasize the essential role of that kind of love in missionary work, temple and family history work, and home-centered, Church-supported family religious observance. Love of the Savior and love of our fellow men and women⁴ is the primary attribute and motive for ministering and the spiritual purposes⁵ we were charged to undertake by our beloved prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, in the adjustments announced in 2018.

1. Doctrine and Covenants 4:1, 5.

2. Moroni 7:47.

3. See “Charity and Love,” *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service*, rev. ed. (2019), 124.

4. See Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:36–40.

5. See “Responsibilities of Elders Quorum and Relief Society Presidencies in Member Missionary and Temple and Family History Work,” notice, Oct. 6, 2018.

Missionary Effort to Gather Scattered Israel

I was exposed to the relationship between missionary work and love early in my life. When I was 11 years old, I received a patriarchal blessing from a patriarch who was also my grandfather.⁶ That blessing said in part, “I bless you with great love for your fellowmen, for thou shalt be called to carry the gospel to the world ... to win souls unto Christ.”⁷

I understood even at that early age that sharing the gospel was based on a great love for all our Heavenly Father’s children.

As General Authorities assigned to work on *Preach My Gospel* 15 years ago, we concluded that the attribute of love was essential to missionary work in our day, just as it has always been.

Chapter 6, on Christlike attributes, including charity and love, has consistently been the most popular chapter among missionaries.

As emissaries of the Savior, most missionaries feel this kind of love, and when they do, their efforts are blessed. When members gain a vision of this kind of love, which is essential in assisting the Lord in His purpose, the Lord’s work will be accomplished.

I was privileged to have a small role in a marvelous example of this kind of love. When I was serving as President of the Pacific Islands Area, I received a call from President R. Wayne Shute. As a young man, he served a mission in Samoa. Later, he returned to Samoa as a mission president.⁸ When he telephoned me, he was the Apia Samoa Temple president. One of his young missionaries, when he was mission president, was Elder O. Vincent Haleck, who is now the Area President in the Pacific. President Shute had great love and respect for Vince and the entire Haleck family. Most of the family were members of the

6. My grandfather was authorized to give a patriarchal blessing to grandchildren who lived in different stakes. Mine was given to me at age 11 because he was ill and it was thought that he might pass away.

7. Patriarchal blessing given to Quentin L. Cook by patriarch Crozier Kimball, Oct. 13, 1951, Draper, Utah.

8. President R. Wayne Shute also served with his wife Lorna on other various kinds of missions in Shanghai, China;

Armenia; Singapore; and Greece. After Lorna passed, he married Rhea Mae Rosvall, and they served in the Australia Brisbane Mission. Seven of his nine children have served full-time missions. During two of the years he was serving as a mission president in Samoa, Elder John H. Groberg was serving as mission president in Tonga. The experiences both of them had are legendary.

Church, but Vince's father, Otto Haleck, the patriarch of the family (of German and Samoan descent), was not a member. President Shute knew I was attending a stake conference and other meetings in American Samoa, and he asked me if I would consider staying in Otto Haleck's residence with the view of sharing the gospel with him.

My wife, Mary, and I stayed with Otto and his wife, Dorothy, in their beautiful home. At breakfast I shared a gospel message and invited Otto to meet with the missionaries. He was kind, but firm, in refusing my invitation. He said he was pleased that many members of his family were Latter-day Saints. But he forcefully indicated that some of his Samoan mother's ancestors had been early Christian ministers in Samoa, and he felt a great allegiance to their traditional Christian faith.⁹ Nevertheless, we left as good friends.

Later, when President Gordon B. Hinckley was preparing to dedicate the Suva Fiji Temple, he had his personal secretary, Brother Don H. Staheli,¹⁰ call me in New Zealand to make arrangements. President Hinckley wanted to fly from Fiji to American Samoa to meet the Saints. A certain hotel used in a previous visit was suggested. I asked if I could make different arrangements. Brother Staheli said, "You are the Area President; that would be fine."

I immediately called President Shute and told him that perhaps we had a second chance at spiritually blessing our friend Otto Haleck. This time the missionary would be President Gordon B. Hinckley. I asked if he thought it would be appropriate for the Halecks to host all of us in President Hinckley's travel group.¹¹ President and Sister Hinckley, their daughter Jane, and Elder and Sister Jeffrey R. Holland were also part of the travel

9. Otto Haleck was a lay leader in the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa, which had roots stemming from the London Missionary Society. His father was of German heritage from Dessau, Germany.

10. President Don H. Staheli is currently serving as the president of the Bountiful Utah Temple.

11. President Gordon B. and Sister

Marjorie P. Hinckley and their daughter Jane Hinckley Dudley, Elder Jeffrey R. and Sister Patricia T. Holland, Elder Quentin L. and Sister Mary G. Cook, and Brother Don H. Staheli were all present.

12. Elder O. Vincent Haleck informs me that his father invited Vince and his brother David to return from overseas to inspect the house and be there for

group. President Shute, working with the family, made all the arrangements.¹²

When we arrived from Fiji after the temple dedication, we were warmly greeted.¹³ We spoke that evening to thousands of Samoan members and then proceeded to the Haleck family compound. When we gathered for breakfast the next morning, President Hinckley and Otto Haleck had already become good friends. It was interesting to me that they were having much the same conversation I had had with Otto more than a year earlier. When Otto expressed his admiration for our Church but reaffirmed his commitment to his existing church, President Hinckley put his hand on Otto's shoulder and said, "Otto, that's not good enough; you ought to be a member of the Church. This is the Lord's Church." You figuratively could see the resistive armor fall away from Otto with an openness to what President Hinckley said.

This was the beginning of additional missionary teaching and a spiritual humility that allowed Otto Haleck to be baptized and confirmed a little over a year later. One year after that, the Haleck family was sealed as an eternal family in the temple.¹⁴

What touched my heart throughout this incredible experience was the overwhelming ministering love exhibited by President Wayne Shute for his former missionary, Elder Vince Haleck, and his desire to see the entire Haleck family united as an eternal family.¹⁵

When it comes to gathering Israel, we need to align our hearts with this kind of love and move away from feelings of mere responsibility¹⁶ or guilt to feelings of love and participation in

President Hinckley's visit. Elder Haleck said his father declared, "These could be angels, you know." He told his sons if they were going to host the prophet, they would want the house to be perfect.

13. President Hinckley was greeted by the national leadership of American Samoa and many thousands of Samoans at the football stadium.
14. Uniting families through diligent missionary work has been a great characteristic of both the Samoan and other Polynesian peoples.

15. President Shute was so loved and appreciated that he was invited to speak at Otto Haleck's funeral service in 2006.

16. "Sometimes we may initially serve from a sense of duty or obligation, but even that service can lead us to draw on something higher ... to serve in 'a more excellent way' [1 Corinthians 12:31]" (Joy D. Jones, "For Him," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 50).

17. See Tad R. Callister, *The Infinite Atonement* (2000), 5–8.

the divine partnership of sharing the Savior's message, ministry, and mission with the world.¹⁷

As members we can show our love for the Savior and our brothers and sisters throughout the world by making simple invitations. The new Sunday meeting schedule represents an exceptional opportunity for members to successfully and lovingly invite friends and associates to come and see and feel a Church experience.¹⁸ A spiritual sacrament meeting, hopefully as sacred as what Elder Jeffrey R. Holland described yesterday, will be followed by a 50-minute meeting focused on the New Testament and the Savior or relevant conference addresses also focused on the Savior and His doctrine.

Some Relief Society sisters have wondered why they have been given a "gathering" assignment along with priesthood quorum members. There are reasons for this, and President Nelson set forth many of them in the last general conference. He concluded, "We simply cannot gather Israel without you."¹⁹ In our day we are blessed that approximately 30 percent of our full-time missionaries are sisters. This provides additional incentive for Relief Society sisters to lovingly share the gospel. What is needed is a loving, compassionate, spiritual commitment by each of us — men, women, youth, and children — to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. If we show love, kindness, and humility, many will accept our invitation. Those who choose not to accept our invitation will still be our friends.

Temple and Family History Effort to Gather Israel

Love is also at the center of our temple and family history effort to gather Israel on the other side of the veil. When we learn of the trials and hardships our ancestors faced, our love and appreciation for them is magnified. Our temple and family history effort has been strengthened to a significant degree by the new adjustments in both the Sunday meeting schedule and the youth advancement in classes and quorums. These changes

18. Church members should coordinate with the missionaries whenever they are making invitations.

19. Russell M. Nelson, "Sisters' Participation in the Gathering of Israel," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 70.

provide for earlier and more powerful attention to learning about our ancestors and gathering Israel on the other side of the veil. Both temple and family history work are greatly enhanced.

The internet is a powerful tool; the home is now our primary family history center. Our young members are exceptionally skilled in family history research and are spiritually motivated to perform baptisms for their ancestors, whom they have learned to love and appreciate. Since the change allowing many 11-year-olds to perform baptisms for the dead, temple presidents across the world report greatly increased attendance. One temple president informs us that “there has been a remarkable increase in baptismal patrons ... and the addition of 11-year-olds brings more families. ... Even at their [young] age, they appear to sense reverence and purpose for the ordinance they are performing. It is beautiful to watch!”²⁰

I know our Primary and youth leaders are making and will continue to make family history and temple work a major effort. Relief Society sisters and priesthood brethren can lovingly help fulfill their temple and family history responsibility individually and also by assisting and inspiring children and youth to gather Israel on the other side of the veil. This is particularly important in the home and on the Sabbath. I promise that lovingly performing ordinances for ancestors will strengthen and protect our youth and families in a world that is becoming increasingly evil. I also personally testify that President Russell M. Nelson has received profoundly important revelations relating to temples and temple work.

Prepare Eternal Families and Individuals to Live with God

The new emphasis on home-centered gospel study and living and the resources that are provided by the Church are a great opportunity for lovingly preparing eternal families and individuals to meet and live with God.²¹

20. Report by President B. Jackson and Sister Rosemary M. Wixom, president and matron of the Salt Lake Temple, to the Primary General Presidency, Mar. 2019. The Wixoms noted that they “are ordering more XXXS baptism clothing

to meet the demand!”

21. See Russell M. Nelson, “Opening Remarks,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 6–8.

22. See Doctrine and Covenants 131:1–4.

When a man and woman are sealed in the temple, they enter the holy order of matrimony in the new and everlasting covenant, an order of the priesthood.²² Together they obtain and receive priesthood blessings and power to direct the affairs of their family. Women and men have unique roles as outlined in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,”²³ but their stewardships are equal in value and importance.²⁴ They have equal power to receive revelation for their family. When they work together in love and righteousness, their decisions are heaven blessed.

Those who seek to know the will of the Lord as individuals and for their families must strive for righteousness, meekness, kindness, and love. Humility and love are the hallmark of those who seek the Lord’s will, especially for their families.

Perfecting ourselves, qualifying ourselves for the blessings of covenants, and preparing to meet God are individual responsibilities. We need to be self-reliant and anxiously engaged in making our homes a refuge from the storms that surround us²⁵ and “a sanctuary of faith.”²⁶ Parents have a responsibility to lovingly teach their children. Homes filled with love are a joy, a delight, and a literal heaven on earth.²⁷

My mother’s favorite hymn was “Love at Home.”²⁸ Whenever she heard the first phrase, “There is beauty all around when there’s love at home,” she became visibly touched and teary. As children we were aware that we lived in that kind of home; it was one of her highest priorities.²⁹

23. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2017, 145.

24. “Every father is to his family a patriarch and every mother a matriarch as coequals in their distinctive parental roles” (James E. Faust, “The Prophetic Voice,” *Ensign*, May 1996, 6).

25. See Doctrine and Covenants 45:26–27; 88:91.

26. Russell M. Nelson, “Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 113.

27. See “Home Can Be a Heaven on Earth,” *Hymns*, 298.

28. “Love at Home,” *Hymns*, 294.

29. If this kind of love is to be achieved, the direction in Doctrine and Covenants 121:41–42 should be the goal: “No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; “By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile.” Undue criticism of children should be avoided. Overcoming errors and lack of wisdom requires instruction, not criticism. Sin requires chastening (see Doctrine and Covenants 1:25–27).

In addition to encouraging a loving atmosphere in the home, President Nelson has focused on limiting media use that disrupts our primary purposes.³⁰ One adjustment that will benefit almost any family is to make the internet, social media, and television a servant instead of a distraction or, even worse, a master. The war for the souls of all, but particularly children, is often in the home. As parents we need to make sure that media content is wholesome, age appropriate, and consistent with the loving atmosphere we are trying to create.

Teaching in our homes needs to be clear and compelling³¹ but also spiritual, joyful, and full of love.

I promise that as we focus on our love for the Savior and His Atonement, make Him the centerpiece of our efforts to gather Israel on both sides of the veil, minister to others, and individually prepare to meet God, the influence of the adversary will be diminished and the joy, delight, and peace of the gospel will magnify our homes with Christlike love.³² I testify of these doctrinal promises and bear a sure witness of Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice in our behalf, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

30. See Russell M. Nelson, "Sisters' Participation in the Gathering of Israel," 69; see also Russell M. Nelson, "Hope of Israel" (worldwide youth devotional, June 3, 2018), HopeofIsrael.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.

31. In a sense, the home is like a one-room school for children of all ages. When teaching the 11-year-old, we can't ignore the 3-year-old.

32. See John 17:3; 2 Nephi 31:20; Moroni 7:47.

Preparing for the Lord's Return

By Elder D. Todd Christofferson
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is uniquely empowered and commissioned to accomplish the necessary preparations for the Lord's Second Coming.

IN TWO WEEKS, we will celebrate Easter. The Resurrection confirms the divinity of Jesus Christ and the reality of God the Father. Our thoughts turn to the Savior, and we ponder “His matchless life and the infinite virtue of His great atoning sacrifice.”¹ I hope we also think about His pending return when “He will rule as King of Kings and ... Lord of Lords.”²

Some time ago in Buenos Aires, Argentina, I participated in a conference with leaders from a wide variety of religious faiths. Their love for their fellowman was unmistakable. They were intent on relieving suffering and helping people rise above oppression and poverty. I reflected on the numerous humanitarian undertakings of this Church, including projects in collaboration with a number of the faith groups represented in the conference. I felt deep gratitude for the generosity of the members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that makes such Christlike service possible.

In that moment, the Holy Spirit affirmed two things to me. First, the work of ministering to temporal needs is vital and must

1. “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2017, inside front cover.

2. “The Living Christ.”

continue. The second was unexpected, yet powerful and clear. It was this: beyond selfless service, it is supremely important to prepare the world for the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. When He comes, oppression and injustice will not only diminish; they will cease:

“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. ...

“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”³

Poverty and suffering will not only decline; they will vanish:

“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

“For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”⁴

Even the pain and sorrow of death will be done away:

“In that day an infant shall not die until he is old; and his life shall be as the age of a tree;

“And when he dies he shall not sleep, that is to say in the earth, but shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye, and shall be caught up, and his rest shall be glorious.”⁵

So yes, let us do all we can to relieve suffering and sorrow now, and let us devote ourselves more diligently to the preparations needed for the day when pain and evil are ended altogether, when “Christ [shall] reign personally upon the earth; and ... the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.”⁶ It will be a day of redemption and judgment. The former Anglican Bishop of Durham, Dr. N. T. Wright, has aptly described the significance of Christ’s Atonement, Resurrection, and Judgment in overcoming injustice and putting all things right. He said:

3. 2 Nephi 21:6, 9; see also Isaiah 11:6, 9.

4. Revelation 7:16–17.

5. Doctrine and Covenants 101:30–31.

6. Articles of Faith 1:10.

*"God has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged rightly by a man whom he has appointed—and of this he has given assurance to all by raising this man from the dead. The facts about Jesus of Nazareth, and especially about his resurrection from the dead, are the foundation of the assurance that the world is not random. It is not ultimately a chaos; that when we do justice in the present we are not whistling in the dark, trying to shore up a building that will ultimately collapse, or to fix a car which is actually bound for the scrap-heap. When God raised Jesus from the dead, that was the microcosmic event in which the ultimate macrocosmic act of judgment was contained in a nutshell, [the] seed... of the ultimate hope. God declared, in the most powerful way imaginable, that Jesus of Nazareth really was the Messiah.... In the greatest irony of history, [Jesus] himself underwent cruel and unjust judgment, coming to the place which symbolized and drew together all the myriad cruelties and injustices of history, to bear that chaos, that darkness, that cruelty, that injustice, in himself, and to exhaust its power."*⁷

While I was at the conference in Buenos Aires that I mentioned earlier, the Spirit made clear to me that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is uniquely empowered and commissioned to accomplish the necessary preparations for the Lord's Second Coming; indeed, it was restored for that purpose. Can you find anywhere else a people who embrace the present era as the prophesied "dispensation of the fulness of times," in which God has purposed to "gather together in one all things in Christ"?⁸ If you don't find here a community intent on accomplishing what needs to be accomplished for both the living and the dead to prepare for that day, if you don't find here an organization willing to commit vast amounts of time and funds to the gathering and preparation of a covenant people ready to receive the Lord, you won't find it anywhere.

Speaking to the Church in 1831, the Lord declared:

"The keys of the kingdom of God are committed unto man on the earth, and from thence shall the gospel roll forth unto the ends of the earth...."

7. N. T. Wright, "Full of the Knowledge of the Lord" (sermon given at matins, Durham, England, Mar. 30, 2016), ntwrightpage.com.

8. Ephesians 1:10.

“Call upon the Lord, that his kingdom may go forth upon the earth, that the inhabitants thereof may receive it, and be prepared for the days to come, in the which the Son of Man shall come down in heaven, clothed in the brightness of his glory, to meet the kingdom of God which is set up on the earth.”⁹

What can we do to prepare now for that day? We can prepare ourselves as a people; we can gather the Lord’s covenant people; and we can help redeem the promise of salvation “made to the fathers,” our ancestors.¹⁰ All of this must occur in some substantial measure before the Lord comes again.

First, and crucial for the Lord’s return, is the presence on the earth of a people prepared to receive Him at His coming. He has stated that those who remain upon the earth in that day, “from the least [to] the greatest, ... shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, and shall see eye to eye, and shall lift up their voice, and with the voice together sing this new song, saying: The Lord hath brought again Zion. ... The Lord hath gathered all things in one. The Lord hath brought down Zion from above. The Lord hath brought up Zion from beneath.”¹¹

In ancient times, God took the righteous city of Zion to Himself.¹² By contrast, in the last days a new Zion will receive the Lord at His return.¹³ Zion is the pure in heart, a people of one heart and one mind, dwelling in righteousness with no poor among them.¹⁴ The Prophet Joseph Smith stated, “We ought to have the building up of Zion as our greatest object.”¹⁵ We build up Zion in our homes, wards, branches, and stakes through unity, godliness, and charity.¹⁶

9. Doctrine and Covenants 65:2, 5.

10. Doctrine and Covenants 2:2.

11. Doctrine and Covenants 84:98–100.

12. The scriptural record states simply, “It came to pass that Zion was not, for God received it up into his own bosom” (Moses 7:69).

13. God declared: “And righteousness will I send down out of heaven; and truth will I send forth out of the earth, to bear testimony of mine Only Begotten; his resurrection from the dead; yea, and also the resurrection of all men; and righteousness and truth will I cause to sweep the earth as with a flood, to gather out mine elect from

the four quarters of the earth, unto a place which I shall prepare, an Holy City, that my people may gird up their loins, and be looking forth for the time of my coming; for there shall be my tabernacle, and it shall be called Zion, a New Jerusalem. ... And for the space of a thousand years the earth shall rest” (Moses 7:62, 64).

14. See Doctrine and Covenants 97:21; Moses 7:18.

15. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 186.

16. See D. Todd Christofferson, “Come to Zion,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2008, 37–40.

We must acknowledge that the building up of Zion occurs in tumultuous times—“a day of wrath, a day of burning, a day of desolation, of weeping, of mourning, and of lamentation; and as a whirlwind it shall come upon all the face of the earth, saith the Lord.”¹⁷ Thus, the gathering into stakes becomes “for a defense, and for a refuge from the storm, and from wrath when it shall be poured out without mixture upon the whole earth.”¹⁸

Just as in former times, we “meet together oft, to fast and to pray, and to speak one with another concerning the welfare of [our] souls. And ... to partake of bread and [water], in remembrance of the Lord Jesus.”¹⁹ As President Russell M. Nelson explained in general conference last October, “The long-standing objective of the Church is to assist all members to increase their faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and in His Atonement, to assist them in making and keeping their covenants with God, and to strengthen and seal their families.”²⁰ Accordingly, he emphasizes the significance of temple covenants, hallowing the Sabbath, and a daily feasting upon the gospel, centered at home and supported by an integrated study curriculum at church. We want to know about the Lord, and we want to know the Lord.²¹

An underlying effort in building Zion is the gathering of the Lord’s long-dispersed covenant people.²² “We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes.”²³ All who will repent, believe on Christ, and be baptized are His covenant people.²⁴ The Lord Himself prophesied that before His return, the gospel would be preached in all the world²⁵ “to recover [His] people, which are of the house of Israel,”²⁶ “and then shall the end come.”²⁷ Jeremiah’s prophecy is being fulfilled:

17. Doctrine and Covenants 112:24.

18. Doctrine and Covenants 115:6.

19. Moroni 6:5–6; see also Alma 6:5–6; 4 Nephi 1:12.

20. Russell M. Nelson, “Opening Remarks,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 7.

21. See Jeremiah 31:34; John 17:3; Doctrine and Covenants 84:98.

22. One by one, the elect are gathered

into the stakes of Zion, “the places of [God’s] appointment” (Doctrine and Covenants 109:39; see also Doctrine and Covenants 124:36).

23. Articles of Faith 1:10.

24. See 2 Nephi 30:2.

25. See Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:31.

26. Doctrine and Covenants 39:11.

27. Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:31.

“Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that [they] shall no more [say], The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt;

“But, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers.”²⁸

President Nelson has repeatedly emphasized that the “gathering [of Israel] is the most important thing taking place on earth today. Nothing else compares in magnitude, nothing else compares in importance, nothing else compares in majesty. And if you choose to, ... you can be a big part of it.”²⁹ The Latter-day Saints have always been a missionary people. Hundreds of thousands have responded to mission calls since the beginning of the Restoration; tens of thousands currently serve. And, as Elder Quentin L. Cook has just taught, all of us can participate in simple and natural ways, in love, inviting others to join us at church, visit in our homes, become part of our circle. Publication of the Book of Mormon was the signal that the gathering had begun.³⁰ The Book of Mormon itself is the instrument of gathering and conversion.

Also vital to the preparation for the Second Coming is the great redemptive effort on behalf of our ancestors. The Lord promised to send Elijah the prophet before the Second Coming, “the great and dreadful day of the Lord,”³¹ to “reveal ... the Priesthood” and “plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers.”³² Elijah did come as promised. The date was April 3, 1836; the place was the Kirtland Temple. In that place and in that moment, he did indeed confer the promised priesthood, the keys for the redemption of the dead and the union of husbands, wives, and families across all generations of time and throughout all eternity.³³ Without this,

28. Jeremiah 16:14–15; see also Jeremiah 23:7–8.

29. Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel” (worldwide youth devotional, June 3, 2018), HopeofIsrael.ChurchofJesusChrist.org; see also Russell M. Nelson, “Remnants

Gathered, Covenants Fulfilled,” in Paul Y. Hoskisson, ed., *Sperry Symposium Classics: The Old Testament* (2005), 1–17.

30. See 3 Nephi 21:1–7.

31. Malachi 4:5.

32. Doctrine and Covenants 2:1–2.

33. See Doctrine and Covenants 110.

the purpose of creation would be frustrated, and in that sense, the earth would be cursed or “utterly wasted.”³⁴

At the youth devotional preceding the dedication of the Rome Italy Temple, the hundreds of young men and women in attendance displayed to President Nelson the cards they had prepared with names of their ancestors. They were ready to enter the temple to perform vicarious baptisms for those ancestors as soon as it opened. It was a supremely gratifying moment, yet but one example of the accelerating effort to establish Zion for the generations that have gone before.

While we strive to be diligent in building up Zion, including our part in the gathering of the Lord’s elect and the redemption of the dead, we should pause to remember that it is the Lord’s work and He is doing it. He is the Lord of the vineyard, and we are His servants. He bids us labor in the vineyard with our might this “last time,” and He labors with us.³⁵ It would probably be more accurate to say He permits us to labor with Him. As Paul said, “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.”³⁶ It is He who is hastening His work in its time.³⁷ Employing our admittedly imperfect efforts — our “small means”—the Lord brings about great things.³⁸

This great and last dispensation is building steadily to its climax — Zion on earth being joined with Zion from above at the Savior’s glorious return. The Church of Jesus Christ is commissioned to prepare — and is preparing — the world for that day. And so, this Easter, let us truly celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and all that it portends: His return to reign for a thousand years of peace, a righteous judgment and perfect justice for all, the immortality of all who ever lived upon this earth, and the promise of eternal life. Christ’s Resurrection is the ultimate assurance that all will be put right. Let us be about building up Zion to hasten that day. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

34. Doctrine and Covenants 2:3; see also Malachi 4:6.

35. See Jacob 5:71–72.

36. 1 Corinthians 3:6.

37. See Doctrine and Covenants 88:73.

38. See 1 Nephi 16:29.

The Atonement of Jesus Christ

By Tad R. Callister

Recently Released Sunday School General President



The Savior's Atonement is not only infinite in scope but also individual in reach.

AT THIS SEASON of the year we particularly rejoice and reflect upon the Savior's Atonement. It is indeed the most supernal, mind-expanding, passionate doctrine this world or universe has ever known. It is what gives hope and purpose to our lives.

What then is the Atonement of Jesus Christ? In one sense, it is a series of divine events that commenced in the Garden of Gethsemane, continued on the cross, and culminated with the Savior's Resurrection from the tomb. It was motivated by an incomprehensible love for each of us. It required a being who was sinless; who had infinite power over the elements — even death; who possessed a boundless capacity to suffer the consequences of all our sins and ailments; and who, in fact, descended beneath it all.¹ This was the mission of Jesus Christ — this was His Atonement.

What then was its purpose? It was to make it possible for us to return to God's presence, become more like Him, and have a fulness of joy. This was done by overcoming four obstacles:

1. Physical death
2. Spiritual death caused by Adam and by our sins
3. Our afflictions and infirmities
4. Our weaknesses and imperfections

1. See Doctrine and Covenants 88:6.

But how can the Savior accomplish this without violating the laws of justice?

Suppose for a moment a man contemplating an exhilarating free fall makes a rash decision and spontaneously jumps from a small plane. After doing so, he quickly realizes the foolishness of his actions. He wants to land safely, but there is an obstacle — the law of gravity. He moves his arms with astounding speed, hoping to fly, but to no avail. He positions his body to float or glide to slow the descent, but the law of gravity is unrelenting and unmerciful. He tries to reason with this basic law of nature: “It was a mistake. I will never do it again.” But his pleas fall on deaf ears. The law of gravity knows no compassion; it makes no exceptions. Fortuitously, though, the man suddenly feels something on his back. His friend in the plane, sensing the moment of foolishness, had placed a parachute there just before the jump. He finds the rip cord and pulls it. Relieved, he floats safely to the ground. We might ask, “Was the law of gravity violated, or did that parachute work within that law to provide a safe landing?”

When we sin, we are like the foolish man who jumped from the plane. No matter what we do on our own, only a crash-landing awaits us. We are subject to the law of justice, which, like the law of gravity, is exacting and unforgiving. We can be saved only because the Savior, through His Atonement, mercifully provides us with a spiritual parachute of sorts. If we have faith in Jesus Christ and repent (meaning we do our part and pull the rip cord), then the protective powers of the Savior are unleashed on our behalf and we can land spiritually unharmed.

This is possible, however, only because the Savior overcame the four obstacles that can prevent our spiritual progress.

1. **Death.** He overcame death through His glorious Resurrection. The Apostle Paul taught, “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”²
2. **Sin.** The Savior overcame sin and guilt for all those who repent. So deep and expansive is His cleansing power that

2. 1 Corinthians 15:20–22.

Isaiah promised, “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.”³

On occasion, I have met with good Saints who have had trouble forgiving themselves, who have innocently but incorrectly placed limits on the Savior’s redemptive powers. Unwittingly, they have converted an infinite Atonement to a finite one that somehow falls short of their particular sin or weakness. But it is an infinite Atonement because it encompasses and circumscribes every sin and weakness, as well as every abuse or pain caused by others.

Truman G. Madsen made this comforting observation:

“If there are some of you who have been tricked into the conviction that you have gone too far, ... that you have had the poison of sin which makes it impossible ever again to be what you could have been — then hear me.

“I bear testimony that you cannot sink farther than the light and sweeping intelligence of Jesus Christ can reach. I bear testimony that as long as there is one spark of the will to repent and to reach, he is there. He did not just descend to your condition; he descended below it, ‘that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth.’ [Doctrine and Covenants 88:6.]”⁴

One reason it is so essential to understand the Savior’s Atonement and its infinite implications is that with increased understanding comes an increased desire to forgive ourselves and others.

Even though we may believe in Christ’s cleansing powers, the question often arises: “How do I know if I have been forgiven of my sins?” If we feel the Spirit, then that is our witness that we have been forgiven, or that the cleansing process is taking place. President Henry B. Eyring taught, “If you have felt the influence of the Holy Ghost ... , you may take it as evidence that the Atonement is working in your life.”⁵

Some have asked, “But if I am forgiven, why do I still feel guilt?” Perhaps in God’s mercy the memory of that guilt is a warning,

3. Isaiah 1:18.

4. Truman G. Madsen, Christ and the Inner Life (1978), 14.

5. Henry B. Eyring, “Gifts of the Spirit for Hard Times,” *Ensign*, June 2007, 23.

a spiritual “stop sign” of sorts that, at least for a time, cries out when additional temptations confront us: “Don’t go down that road. You know the pain it can bring.” In this sense, it serves as a protection, not a punishment.

Is it possible, then, to remember our sins and still be free of guilt?

Alma remembered his sins, even years after he repented. But when he cried unto Jesus for mercy, he said, “I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.”⁶

How could he remember his sins but have no pain or guilt? Because when we repent, we are “born of God.”⁷ We become, as the scriptures say, “new creatures”⁸ in Christ. With perfect honesty we can now say, “I am not the man or woman who committed those past sins. I am a new and transformed being.”

3. Afflictions and Infirmities. Alma prophesied that Christ “shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind.” Why? “That his bowels may be filled with mercy, ... that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.”⁹

How does He accomplish this? Sometimes He removes the affliction, sometimes He strengthens us to endure, and sometimes He gives us an eternal perspective to better understand their temporary nature. After Joseph Smith had languished in Liberty Jail for about two months, he finally cried out, “O God, where art thou?”¹⁰ Instead of providing instant relief, God responded, “My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; and then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high.”¹¹

Joseph now understood that this bitter experience was but a dot on the eternal spectrum. With this enhanced vision, he wrote the Saints from that same prison cell, “Dearly beloved brethren, let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the

6. Alma 36:19; see also Alma 36:20–21.

7. Alma 36:23; see also Alma 36:24–26.

8. Mosiah 27:26.

9. Alma 7:11–12.

10. Doctrine and Covenants 121:1.

11. Doctrine and Covenants 121:7–8.

salvation of God.”¹² Because of the Savior’s Atonement, we can have an eternal perspective that gives meaning to our trials and hope for our relief.

4. **Weaknesses and Imperfections.** Because of His Atonement, the Savior has enabling powers, sometimes referred to as grace,¹³ that can help us overcome our weaknesses and imperfections and thus assist us in our pursuit to become more like Him.

Moroni so taught: “Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, ... that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ.”¹⁴ There seem at least two channels or means of availing ourselves of those enabling powers that can refine — even perfect — us.

First, the saving ordinances. The scriptures tell us, “In the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest.”¹⁵ Sometimes we may think of ordinances as a checklist — necessary for exaltation; but in truth each unleashes a godly power that helps us become more like Christ. For example:

- When we are baptized and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, we are made clean — thus becoming more holy like God.
- In addition, through the Holy Ghost, our minds may be enlightened and our hearts softened so we can think and feel more like Him.
- And when we are sealed as spouses, we inherit the right to “thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers”¹⁶ as gifts from God.

A second channel for these enabling powers is the gifts of the Spirit. Because of Christ’s Atonement, we are eligible to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost and its accompanying spiritual gifts. These gifts are attributes of godliness; therefore, each time we acquire a gift of the Spirit, we become more like God. No doubt that is why the scriptures enjoin us on multiple occasions to seek these gifts.¹⁷

12. Doctrine and Covenants 123:17.

13. See Bible Dictionary, “Grace”; see also Guide to the Scriptures, “Grace,” scriptures.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.

14. Moroni 10:32.

15. Doctrine and Covenants 84:20.

16. Doctrine and Covenants 132:19.

17. See 1 Corinthians 12:31; Moroni 10:30; Doctrine and Covenants 46:8.

President George Q. Cannon taught: “No man ought to say, ‘Oh, I cannot help this; it is my nature.’ He is not justified in it, for the reason that God has promised to ... give gifts that will eradicate [our weaknesses]. ... If any of us are imperfect, it is our duty to pray for the gift that will make us perfect.”¹⁸

In summary, the Savior’s Atonement gives us life for death, “beauty for ashes,”¹⁹ healing for hurt, and perfection for weakness. It is heaven’s antidote to the obstacles and struggles of this world.

In the Savior’s final week of mortality, He said, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”²⁰ Because the Savior performed His Atonement, there is no external force or event or person — no sin or death or divorce — that can prevent us from achieving exaltation, provided we keep God’s commandments. With that knowledge, we can press forward with good cheer and absolute assurance that God is with us in this heavenly quest.

I bear my witness that the Savior’s Atonement is not only infinite in scope but also individual in reach — that it can not only return us to God’s presence but also enable us to become like Him — the crowning goal of Christ’s Atonement. Of that I bear my grateful and certain witness in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

18. George Q. Cannon, “Seeking Spiritual Gifts,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Apr. 2016, 80.

19. Isaiah 61:3.

20. John 16:33.

“Come, Follow Me”

By President Russell M. Nelson

Jesus Christ invites us to take the covenant path back home to our Heavenly Parents and be with those we love.



MY BELOVED BROTHERS and sisters, my wife Wendy and I rejoice in being with you on this Sabbath morning. Much has happened since our last general conference. New temples have been dedicated in Concepción, Chile; Barranquilla, Colombia; and Rome, Italy. We experienced a rich outpouring of the Spirit at these sacred events.

I congratulate the many women (and men) who have recently read the Book of Mormon and discovered joy and hidden treasures. I am inspired by reports about miracles received.

I marvel at 11-year-old young men who, now as deacons, worthily pass the sacrament each Sunday. They go to the temple along with our 11-year-old young women, who are now eagerly learning and serving as Beehives. Both young men and young women are preaching gospel truths with clarity and conviction.

I rejoice with children and youth who are helping to teach the gospel in their homes as they work with their parents to follow the home-centered, Church-supported curriculum.

We received this photo of four-year-old Blake, who, early on a Saturday morning, grabbed a Church book and exclaimed, “I need to feed my spirit!”

Blake, we are thrilled with you and others who are choosing to feed their spirits by feasting on the truths of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. And we delight in knowing that many are receiving the power of God in their lives as they worship and serve in the temple.

As many of you know, our family experienced a tender separation three months ago when our daughter Wendy departed from this mortal life. In the final days of her battle with cancer, I was blessed with the opportunity to have our farewell daddy-daughter conversation.

I held her hands and told her how much I loved her and how grateful I was to be her father. I said: “You married in the temple and faithfully honored your covenants. You and your husband welcomed seven children into your home and raised them to be devout disciples of Jesus Christ, valiant Church members, and contributing citizens. And they have chosen spouses of that same caliber. Your daddy is very, very proud of you. You have brought me much joy!”

She quietly responded, “Thank you, Daddy.”

It was a tender, tearful moment for us. During her 67 years, we worked together, sang together, and often skied together. But that evening, we talked of things that matter most, such as covenants, ordinances, obedience, faith, family, fidelity, love, and eternal life.

We miss our daughter greatly. However, because of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, we do not worry about her. As we continue to honor our covenants with God, we live in anticipation of our being with her again. Meanwhile, we’re serving the Lord here and she is serving Him there — in paradise.¹

Actually, my wife and I visited Paradise earlier this year — Paradise, California, that is. As it happened, our scheduled visit there came less than 40 hours after our daughter departed from this world. We, along with Elder Kevin W. Pearson and his wife, June, were bolstered by the Saints of the Chico California Stake. We learned of their great faith, their ministering, and the miracles that occurred even amidst their devastating losses from the most destructive wildfire in the history of California.

While there, we spoke at length with a young police officer, John, who was one of many brave first responders. He recalled the thick darkness that descended upon Paradise on November 8,

1. See Alma 40:12–14.

2018, as flames and embers raced through the town, devouring property and possessions like a scourge and leaving nothing but piles of ash and stark brick chimneys.

For 15 hours, John drove through an impenetrable darkness that was streaked with javelins of threatening embers as he helped person after person, family after family escape to safety — all at the peril of his own life. Yet during that strenuous ordeal, what terrified John most was his all-consuming question: “Where is my family?” After many long, terrifying hours of anguish, he finally learned of their safe evacuation.

The account of John’s concern for his family has prompted me to speak today with those of you who may ask when approaching the end of your mortal life, “Where is my family?” In that coming day when you will complete your mortal probation and enter the spirit world, you will be brought face-to-face with that heart-wrenching question: “*Where is my family?*”

Jesus Christ teaches the way back to our eternal home. He understands our Heavenly Father’s plan of eternal progression better than any of us. After all, He is the keystone of it all. He is our Redeemer, our Healer, and our Savior.

Ever since Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, Jesus the Christ has offered His mighty arm to help all who choose to follow Him. Repeatedly, scriptures record that despite all kinds of sins from all kinds of people, His arms are outstretched still.²

The spirit in each of us naturally yearns for family love to last forever. Love songs perpetuate a false hope that love is all you need if you want to be together forever. And some erroneously believe that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ provides a promise that all people will be with their loved ones after death.

In truth, the Savior Himself has made it abundantly clear that while His Resurrection assures that every person who ever lived will indeed be resurrected and live forever,³ much more

2. See Jeremiah 27:5; Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34; Alma 5:33; 3 Nephi 9:14.

3. The Resurrection will come to all

because of Christ’s victory over death (see Alma 11:41–45; 40; Doctrine and Covenants 76; Moses 7:62).

is required if we want to have the high privilege of exaltation. Salvation is an individual matter, but exaltation is a family matter.

Listen to these words spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ to His prophet: “All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations, that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise ... are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection from the dead; for all contracts that are not made unto this end have an end when men are dead.”⁴

So, what is required for a family to be exalted forever? We qualify for *that* privilege by making covenants with God, keeping those covenants, and receiving essential ordinances.

This has been true since the beginning of time. Adam and Eve, Noah and his wife, Abraham and Sarah, Lehi and Sariah, and all other devoted disciples of Jesus Christ — since the world was created — have made the same covenants with God. They have received the same ordinances that we as members of the Lord’s restored Church today have made: those covenants that we receive at baptism and in the temple.

The Savior invites all to follow Him into the waters of baptism and, in time, to make additional covenants with God in the temple and receive and be faithful to those further essential ordinances. All these are required if we want to be exalted with our families and with God forever.

The anguish of my heart is that many people whom I love, whom I admire, and whom I respect decline His invitation. They ignore the pleadings of Jesus Christ when He beckons, “Come, follow me.”⁵

I understand why God weeps.⁶ I also weep for such friends and relatives. They are wonderful men and women, devoted to their family and civic responsibilities. They give generously of their time, energy, and resources. And the world is better for their efforts. But they have chosen not to make covenants with God.

4. Doctrine and Covenants 132:7.

5. Luke 18:22.

6. See John 11:35; Moses 7:28–29.

They have not received the ordinances that will exalt them with their families and bind them together forever.⁷

How I wish I could visit with them and invite them to consider seriously the enabling laws of the Lord. I've wondered what I could possibly say so they would feel how much the Savior loves them and know how much I love them and come to recognize how covenant-keeping women and men can receive a "fulness of joy."⁸

They need to understand that while there is a place for them hereafter — with wonderful men and women who also chose not to make covenants with God — that is *not* the place where families will be reunited and be given the privilege to live and progress forever. That is *not* the kingdom where they will experience the fulness of joy — of never-ending progression and happiness.⁹ Those consummate blessings can come only by living in an exalted celestial realm with God, our Eternal Father; His Son, Jesus Christ; and our wonderful, worthy, and qualified family members.

I feel to say to my reticent friends:

"In this life, you have never settled for second best in anything. Yet, as you resist fully embracing the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, you are choosing to settle for second best.

"The Savior said, 'In my Father's house are many mansions.'¹⁰ However, as you choose not to make covenants with God, you are settling for a most meager roof over your head throughout all eternity."

I would further entreat my reticent friends by saying:

"Pour out your heart to God. Ask Him if these things are true. Make time to study His words. Really study! If you truly love your family and if you desire to be exalted with them throughout eternity, pay the price now — through serious study and fervent prayer — to know these eternal truths and then to abide by them.

7. See Doctrine and Covenants 76:50–70.

8. Doctrine and Covenants 138:17.

9. See Mosiah 2:41; Alma 28:12.

10. John 14:2.

“If you are not sure you even believe in God, start there. Understand that in the absence of experiences with God, one can doubt the existence of God. So, put yourself in a position to begin having experiences with Him. Humble yourself. Pray to have eyes to see God’s hand in your life and in the world around you. Ask Him to tell you if He is really there — if He knows you. Ask Him how He feels about you. And then listen.”

One such dear friend of mine had limited experiences with God. But he longed to be with his departed wife. So he asked me to help him. I encouraged him to meet with our missionaries in order to understand the doctrine of Christ and learn of gospel covenants, ordinances, and blessings.

That he did. But he felt the course they advised would require him to make too many changes in his life. He said, “Those commandments and covenants are just too difficult for me. Also, I can’t possibly pay tithing, and I don’t have time to serve in the Church.” Then he asked me, “Once I die, please do the necessary temple work for my wife and me so that we can be together again.”

Thankfully, I am not this man’s judge. But I do question the efficacy of proxy temple work for a man who had the opportunity to be baptized in this life — to be ordained to the priesthood and receive temple blessings while here in mortality — but who made the conscious decision to reject that course.

My dear brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ invites us to take the covenant path back home to our Heavenly Parents and be with those we love. He invites us to “come, follow me.”

Now, as President of His Church, I plead with you who have distanced yourselves from the Church and with you who have not yet really sought to know that the Savior’s Church has been restored. Do the spiritual work to find out for yourselves, and please do it now. Time is running out.

I testify that God lives! Jesus is the Christ. His Church and the fulness of His gospel have been restored to bless our lives with joy, here and hereafter. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Cleansed by Repentance

By President Dallin H. Oaks
First Counselor in the First Presidency



Because of God's plan and the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we can be cleansed by the process of repentance.

IN MORTALITY WE are subject to the laws of man and the laws of God. I have had the unusual experience of judging serious misbehavior under both of these laws — earlier as a justice of the Utah Supreme Court and now as a member of the First Presidency. The contrast I have experienced between the laws of man and the laws of God has increased my appreciation for the reality and power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Under the laws of man, a person guilty of the most serious crimes can be sentenced to life in prison without possibility of parole. But it is different under the merciful plan of a loving Heavenly Father. I have witnessed that these same serious sins can be forgiven in mortality because of our Savior's atoning sacrifice for the sins of "all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit" (2 Nephi 2:7). Christ redeems, and His Atonement is real.

The loving compassion of our Savior is expressed in the great hymn just performed by the choir.

*Come unto Jesus; He'll ever heed you,
Though in the darkness you've gone astray.
His love will find you and gently lead you
From darkest night into day.¹*

1. "Come unto Jesus," *Hymns*, 117.

The atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ opens the door for “all men [to] repent and come unto him” (Doctrine and Covenants 18:11; see also Mark 3:28; 1 Nephi 10:18; Alma 34:8, 16). The book of Alma reports repentance and forgiveness even of those who had been a wicked and a bloodthirsty people (see Alma 25:16; 27:27, 30). My message today is one of hope for all of us, including those who have lost their membership in the Church by excommunication or name removal. We are all sinners who can be cleansed by repentance. “To repent from sin is not easy,” Elder Russell M. Nelson taught in a prior general conference. “But the prize is worth the price.”²

I. Repentance

Repentance begins with our Savior, and it is a joy, not a burden. In last December’s Christmas devotional, President Nelson taught: “True repentance is not an event. It is a never-ending privilege. It is *fundamental* to progression and having peace of mind, comfort, and joy.”³

Some of the greatest teachings on repentance are in Alma’s Book of Mormon sermon to members of the Church whom he later described as having been in a state of “much unbelief,” “lifted up in ... pride,” and with hearts set “upon riches and the vain things of the world” (Alma 7:6). Each member of this restored Church has much to learn from Alma’s inspired teachings.

We begin with faith in Jesus Christ, because “it is he that cometh to take away the sins of the world” (Alma 5:48). We must repent because, as Alma taught, “except ye repent ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of heaven” (Alma 5:51). Repentance is an essential part of God’s plan. Because all would sin in our mortal experience and be cut off from God’s presence, man could not “be saved” without repentance (Alma 5:31; see also Helaman 12:22).

This has been taught from the beginning. The Lord commanded Adam, “Teach it unto your children, that all men, everywhere,

2. Russell M. Nelson, “Repentance and Conversion,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2007, 102.

3. Russell M. Nelson, “Four Gifts That

Jesus Christ Offers to You” (2018 First Presidency’s Christmas Devotional, Dec. 2, 2018), broadcasts. ChurchofJesusChrist.org.

must repent, or they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God, for no unclean thing can dwell there, or dwell in his presence” (Moses 6:57). We must repent of all our sins — all of our actions or inactions contrary to the commandments of God. No one is exempt. Just last evening President Nelson challenged us, “Brethren, we all need to repent.”⁴

To be cleansed by repentance, we must forsake our sins and confess them to the Lord and to His mortal judge where required (see Doctrine and Covenants 58:43). Alma taught that we must also “bring forth works of righteousness” (Alma 5:35). All of this is part of the frequent scriptural invitation to come unto Christ.

We need to partake of the sacrament each Sabbath day. In that ordinance we make covenants and receive blessings that help us overcome all acts and desires that block us from the perfection our Savior invites us to achieve (see Matthew 5:48; 3 Nephi 12:48). As we “deny [ourselves] of all ungodliness, and love God with all [our] might, mind and strength,” then we may “be perfect in Christ” and be “sanctified” through the shedding of His blood, to “become holy, without spot” (Moroni 10:32–33). What a promise! What a miracle! What a blessing!

II. Accountability and Mortal Judgments

One purpose of God’s plan for this mortal experience is to “prove” us “to see if [we] will do all things whatsoever the Lord [our] God shall command [us]” (Abraham 3:25). As part of this plan, we are accountable to God and to His chosen servants, and that accountability involves both mortal and divine judgments.

In the Lord’s Church, mortal judgments for members or prospective members are administered by leaders who seek divine direction. It is their responsibility to judge persons who are seeking to come unto Christ to receive the power of His Atonement on the covenant path to eternal life. Mortal judgments determine whether a person is ready for baptism. Is a person worthy of a recommend to attend the temple? Has

4. Russell M. Nelson, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2019, 69.

a person whose name was removed from the records of the Church repented sufficiently through the Atonement of Jesus Christ to be readmitted by baptism?

When a mortal judge called of God approves a person for further progress, such as temple privileges, he is not signifying that person as perfect, and he is not forgiving any sins. Elder Spencer W. Kimball taught that after what he called the mortal “waiving [of] penalties,” a person “must also seek and secure from the God of heaven a final repentance, and only he can absolve.”⁵ And if sinful acts and desires remain unrepented until the Final Judgment, an unrepentant person will remain unclean. The ultimate accountability, including the final cleansing effect of repentance, is between each of us and God.

III. Resurrection and the Final Judgment

The judgment most commonly described in the scriptures is the Final Judgment that follows the Resurrection (see 2 Nephi 9:15). Many scriptures state that “we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (Romans 14:10; see also 2 Nephi 9:15; Mosiah 27:31) “to be judged according to the deeds [that] have been done in the mortal body” (Alma 5:15; see also Revelation 20:12; Alma 41:3; 3 Nephi 26:4). All will be judged “according to their works” (3 Nephi 27:15) and “according to the desire[s] of their hearts” (Doctrine and Covenants 137:9; see also Alma 41:6).

The purpose of this Final Judgment is to determine whether we have achieved what Alma described as a “mighty change of heart” (see Alma 5:14, 26), where we have become new creatures, with “no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2). The judge of this is our Savior, Jesus Christ (see John 5:22; 2 Nephi 9:41). After His judgment we will all confess “that his judgments are just” (Mosiah 16:1; see also Mosiah 27:31; Alma 12:15), because His omniscience (see 2 Nephi 9:15, 20) has given Him a perfect knowledge of all of our acts and desires, both those righteous or repented and those unrepented or unchanged.

5. *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (1982), 101.

The scriptures describe the *process* of this Final Judgment. Alma teaches that the justice of our God requires that in the Resurrection “all things should be restored to their proper order” (Alma 41:2). This means that “if their works were good in this life, and the desires of their hearts were good, ... at the last day [they will] be restored unto that which is good” (Alma 41:3). Similarly, “if their works [or their desires] are evil they shall be restored [to] them for evil” (Alma 41:4–5; see also Helaman 14:31). Similarly, the prophet Jacob taught that in the Final Judgment “they who are righteous shall be righteous still, and they who are filthy shall be filthy still” (2 Nephi 9:16; see also Mormon 9:14; 1 Nephi 15:33). That is the process preceding our standing before what Moroni calls “the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah, the Eternal Judge of both quick and dead” (Moroni 10:34; see also 3 Nephi 27:16).

To assure that we will be clean before God, we must repent *before* the Final Judgment (see Mormon 3:22). As Alma told his sinful son, we cannot hide our sins before God, “and *except ye repent* they will stand as a testimony against you at the last day” (Alma 39:8; emphasis added). The Atonement of Jesus Christ gives us the only way to achieve the needed cleansing through repentance, and this mortal life is the time to do it. Although we are taught that some repentance can occur in the spirit world (see Doctrine and Covenants 138:31, 33, 58), that is not as certain. Elder Melvin J. Ballard taught: “It is much easier to overcome and serve the Lord when both flesh and spirit are combined as one. This is the time when men are more pliable and susceptible. ... This life is the time to repent.”⁶

When we repent, we have the Lord’s assurance that our sins, including our acts and desires, will be cleansed and our merciful final judge will “remember them no more” (Doctrine and Covenants 58:42; see also Isaiah 1:18; Jeremiah 31:34; Hebrews 8:12; Alma 41:6; Helaman 14:18–19). Cleansed by repentance, we can qualify for eternal life, which King Benjamin described

6. Melvin J. Ballard, in Melvin R. Ballard, Melvin J. Ballard: Crusader for Righteousness (1966), 212–13.

as “dwell[ing] with God in a state of never-ending happiness” (Mosiah 2:41; see also Doctrine and Covenants 14:7).

As another part of God’s “plan of restoration” (Alma 41:2), the Resurrection will restore “all things ... to their proper and perfect frame” (Alma 40:23). This includes the perfection of all of our *physical* deficiencies and deformities acquired in mortality, including at birth or by trauma or disease.

Does this restoration perfect us of all our unholy or unconquered desires or addictions? That cannot be. We know from modern revelation that we will be judged for our desires as well as our actions (see Alma 41:5; Doctrine and Covenants 137:9) and that even our *thoughts* will condemn us (see Alma 12:14). We must not “procrastinate the day of [our] repentance” until death, Amulek taught (Alma 34:33), because the same spirit that has possessed our body in this life — whether the Lord’s or the devil’s — “will have power to possess [our] body in that eternal world” (Alma 34:34). Our Savior has the power and stands ready to cleanse us from evil. Now is the time to seek His help to repent of our wicked or unseemly desires and thoughts to be clean and prepared to stand before God at the Final Judgment.

IV. The Arms of Mercy

Overarching God’s plan and all of His commandments is His love for each of us, which is “most desirable above all things ... and the most joyous to the soul” (1 Nephi 11:22–23). The prophet Isaiah assured even the wicked that when they “return unto the Lord, ... he will have mercy ... [and] abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:7). Alma taught, “Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them” (Alma 5:33; see also 2 Nephi 26:25–33). The risen Lord told the Nephites, “Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive” (3 Nephi 9:14). From these and many other scriptural teachings, we know that our loving Savior opens His arms to receive all men and women on

7. See Tad R. Callister, *The Infinite Atonement* (2000), 27–29.

the loving conditions He has prescribed to enjoy the greatest blessings God has for His children.⁷

Because of God's plan and the Atonement of Jesus Christ, I testify with a "perfect brightness of hope" that God loves us and we can be cleansed by the process of repentance. We are promised that "if [we] press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life" (2 Nephi 31:20). May we all do so, I plead and pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Exercising Our Spiritual Muscles

By Elder Juan Pablo Villar
Of the Seventy



Just as reading and learning about muscles is not enough to build muscle, reading and learning about faith without adding action is insufficient to build faith.

I AM GRATEFUL for the blessing of having a physical body, which is an amazing gift from our Heavenly Father. Our bodies have over 600 muscles.¹ Many muscles require exercise in order to be in condition to perform our daily activities. We could expend much mental effort reading and learning about our muscles, but if we think this will make them stronger, we will be very disappointed. Our muscles grow only when we use them.

I have come to realize that spiritual gifts behave in the same way. They also need to be exercised to grow. The spiritual gift of faith, for example, is not just a feeling or a mood; it is a principle of action that frequently appears in the scriptures linked to the verb *exercise*.² Just as reading and learning about muscles is not enough to build muscle, reading and learning about faith without adding action is insufficient to build faith.

When I was 16 years old, my oldest brother, Ivan, who was 22 at that time, came home one day and shared some news with the family. He had decided to get baptized in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Our parents looked at him somewhat

1. Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. "Human Muscle System," last modified Apr. 26, 2018, [britannica.com/science/human-muscle-system](https://www.britannica.com/science/human-muscle-system).

2. See, for example, Alma 5:15; 32:27; 34:17; Moroni 7:25; Doctrine and Covenants 44:2.

skeptically, and I remember not completely understanding what was going on. A year or so later, he gave us more surprising news: he had decided to serve as a missionary of the Church, which meant that we were not going to see him for two years. My parents were not thrilled with this news; however, I saw in him a clear determination that increased my admiration for him and the decision he had made.

Months later, while Ivan was serving his mission, I had the opportunity to plan a vacation with some schoolmates. We wanted to celebrate the end of our high school years and spend a few days at the beach.

I wrote a letter to my missionary brother, mentioning my summer vacation plans. He wrote back that the town he was serving in was on the way to my destination. I decided it would be a good idea to stop by and visit him. It was not until later that I learned that missionaries are not supposed to be visited by family.

I made all the arrangements. I remember sitting on the bus thinking of all the fun Ivan and I would have together on this beautiful sunny day. We would have breakfast, chat, play in the sand, sunbathe — what a great time we were going to have!

As the bus arrived at the terminal, I saw Ivan standing next to another young man, both in white shirts and ties. I got off the bus, we hugged each other, and he introduced his companion. Without wasting another minute, I told my brother my plans for the day, but little did I know what Ivan had scheduled. He looked at me, smiled, and said, “Sure! However, we need to do some errands first. Would you come with us?” I agreed, thinking that we would have enough time to enjoy the beach afterward.

That day, for more than 10 hours, I walked through the streets of that town with my brother and his companion. I smiled at people all day. I greeted people I had never seen in my life. We talked to everyone, knocked on the doors of strangers, and visited people my brother and his companion were teaching.

During one such visit, my brother and his companion were teaching about Jesus Christ and the plan of salvation. Suddenly, Ivan paused and looked at me. To my surprise, he politely asked me to share my opinion about what was being taught. The room

fell silent, and all eyes were on me. With some difficulty, I finally found the words and shared my feelings about the Savior. I did not know if what I shared was right or wrong. My brother never corrected me; to the contrary, he thanked me for sharing my thoughts and feelings.

During those hours together, my brother and his companion did not spend a single minute teaching a lesson exclusively to me, yet I gained more knowledge than in all my previous conversations with him. I witnessed how countenances were changed as people received spiritual light in their lives. I saw how some of them found hope in the messages, and I learned how to serve others and forget about myself and my own desires. I was doing what the Savior taught: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself.”³

Looking back, I realize that my faith grew that day because my brother gave me the opportunity to put it in action. I exercised it as we read from the scriptures, looked for people to teach, bore testimony, served others, and so on. We never got around to sunbathing that day, but my heart was bathed in light from heaven. I did not see even one small grain of sand at the beach, but I felt my faith grow like a small grain of mustard seed.⁴ I did not spend the sunny day as a tourist, but I gained wonderful experiences, and without realizing it, I was a missionary — without even being a member of the Church!

Opportunities to Strengthen Spiritual Muscles

Thanks to the Restoration of the gospel, we can come to understand how our Heavenly Father helps us develop spiritual gifts. It is more likely that He will give us opportunities to develop those gifts rather than just granting them to us without spiritual and physical effort. If we are in tune with His Spirit, we will learn to identify those opportunities and then act upon them.

If we seek more patience, we may find ourselves needing to practice it while waiting for a response. If we want to have more

3. Matthew 16:24.

4. See Luke 17:6.

love for our neighbor, we can foster it by sitting next to a new face at church. With faith it is similar: when doubts come to our minds, trusting in the Lord's promises will be required to move forward. In this way, we are exercising spiritual muscles and developing them into sources of strength in our lives.

It will probably not be easy at the beginning, and it might even become a big challenge. The words of the Lord, through the prophet Moroni, apply to us today: "And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have [or exercise] faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them."⁵

I am grateful for my brother Ivan, who not only shared the gospel with me but also indirectly invited me to live it and recognize my weaknesses. He helped me to accept the invitation of the Master: "Come, follow me"⁶ — to walk as the Savior walked, seek as the Savior sought, and love as the Savior loves us. Months later, after my missionary experience, I decided to get baptized and to serve my own mission.

Let's accept the invitation of President Russell M. Nelson and intently come unto the Savior⁷ by identifying those muscles that need more spiritual activity and starting to exercise them. This is a long-distance race, a marathon, rather than a sprint, so do not forget those small but constant spiritual activities that will strengthen those important spiritual muscles. If we want to increase our faith, then let's do things that require faith.

I bear my witness that we are children of a loving Heavenly Father. His Son, Jesus Christ, loves us. He came to this world to show us the way and then gave His life voluntarily to give us hope. The Savior invites us to follow His perfect example, to exercise our faith in Him and His Atonement, and to expand all the spiritual gifts that we have been blessed with. He is the way. This is my testimony in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

5. Ether 12:27.

6. Luke 18:22.

7. See Russell M. Nelson, "Let Us All Press On," *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2018, 118–19.

Good Shepherd, Lamb of God

By Elder Gerrit W. Gong
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



*Jesus Christ calls us in His voice and His name.
He seeks and gathers us. He teaches us how to
minister in love.*

DEAR BROTHERS AND sisters, have you ever had trouble falling asleep and tried counting imaginary sheep? As fluffy sheep jump over a fence, you count: 1, 2, 3, ... 245, 246, ... 657, 658 ...¹

In my case, counting sheep doesn't make me sleepy. I worry about missing or losing one, and that keeps me awake.

With the shepherd boy who became a king, we declare:

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

"He restoreth my soul."²

At this Easter season, we celebrate the Good Shepherd, who is also the Lamb of God. Of all His divine titles, no others are more tender or telling. We learn much from our Savior's references to Himself as the Good Shepherd and from prophetic testimonies of Him as the Lamb of God. These roles and symbols are powerfully complementary — who better to succor each precious lamb than the Good Shepherd, and who better to be our Good Shepherd than the Lamb of God?

1. A popular song suggests "When I'm worried and I can't sleep, I count my blessings instead of sheep. And I fall asleep counting my blessings." (Irving

Berlin, "Count Your Blessings Instead of Sheep" [1952])
2. Psalm 23:1–3.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son,” and God’s Only Begotten Son laid down His life in willing obedience to His Father.³ Jesus testifies, “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”⁴ Jesus had power to lay down His life and power to take it up again.⁵ United with His Father, our Savior uniquely blesses us, both as our Good Shepherd and as the Lamb of God.

As our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ calls us in His voice and His name. He seeks and gathers us. He teaches us how to minister in love. Let us consider these three themes, beginning with Him calling us in His voice and His name.

First, our Good Shepherd “callesh his own sheep by name. ... They know his voice.”⁶ And “in his own name he doth call you, which is the name of Christ.”⁷ As we seek with real intent to follow Jesus Christ, inspiration comes to do good, to love God, and to serve Him.⁸ As we study, ponder, and pray; as we regularly renew sacramental and temple covenants; and as we invite all to come to His gospel and ordinances, we are hearkening to His voice.

In our day, President Russell M. Nelson counsels us to call the restored Church by the name Jesus Christ revealed: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.⁹ The Lord said, “Whatsoever ye shall do, ye shall do it *in my name*; therefore ye shall call the church in my name; and ye shall call upon the Father *in my name* that he will bless the church for my sake.”¹⁰ Across the world, in our hearts and homes, we call upon the Father in the name of Jesus Christ. We are grateful for such generous blessing of our home-centered, Church-supported worship, gospel study, and wholesome family activities.

Second, our Good Shepherd seeks and gathers us into His one fold. He asks, “What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, *until he find it?*”¹¹

3. John 3:16.

4. John 10:11.

5. See John 10:15, 17–18.

6. John 10:3–4.

7. Alma 5:38; see also Alma 5:37, 39, 59–60.

8. See Moroni 7:13; Doctrine and Covenants 8:2–3.

9. See Russell M. Nelson, “The Correct Name of the Church,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 87–89.

10. 3 Nephi 27:7; emphasis added.

Our Savior reaches out to the one and to the ninety-and-nine, often at the same time. As we minister, we acknowledge the ninety-and-nine who are steadfast and immovable, even while we yearn after the one who has strayed. Our Lord seeks and delivers us “out of all places,”¹² “from the four quarters of the earth.”¹³ He gathers us by holy covenant and His atoning blood.¹⁴

Our Savior told His New Testament disciples, “Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold.”¹⁵ In the Americas, the resurrected Lord testified to Lehi’s covenant children, “Ye are my sheep.”¹⁶ And Jesus said yet other sheep would hear His voice.¹⁷ What a blessing the Book of Mormon is as another testament witnessing the voice of Jesus Christ!

Jesus Christ invites the Church to receive all who hear His voice¹⁸ and keep His commandments. The doctrine of Christ includes baptism by water and by fire and the Holy Ghost.¹⁹ Nephi asks, “If the Lamb of God, he being holy, should have need to be baptized by water, to fulfil all righteousness, O then, how much more need have we, being unholy, to be baptized, yea, even by water!”²⁰

Today our Savior desires that what we do and who we are becoming will invite others to come, follow Him. Come find love, healing, connection, and covenant belonging in Him, including in God’s holy temple, where sacred ordinances of salvation can bless all family members, thus gathering Israel on both sides of the veil.²¹

Third, as the “Shepherd of Israel,”²² Jesus Christ exemplifies how shepherds in Israel minister in love. When our Lord asks if

11. Luke 15:4, emphasis added; see also Doctrine and Covenants 18:15.

12. Ezekiel 34:12; see also Jeremiah 31:10; Ezekiel 34:6, 11–14; Micah 5:8; Matthew 10:6; 15:24. These prophecies of scattering and the prophecies and promises of covenant gathering are a consistent theme of the prophets, including President Russell M. Nelson.

13. 1 Nephi 22:25.

14. See Hebrews 13:20.

15. John 10:16; see also 3 Nephi 15:21; 16:1, 3; Doctrine and Covenants 10:59–60.

16. 3 Nephi 15:24; see also 3 Nephi 15:17, 21.

17. See 3 Nephi 16:1, 3; see also Doctrine and Covenants 10:59–60.

18. See Mosiah 26:21.

19. See 2 Nephi 31:13–14, 21.

20. 2 Nephi 31:5; see also Alma 7:14.

21. See Malachi 4:5–6; John 15:9–13; Mosiah 25:18; Helaman 11:21; see also Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel” (worldwide youth devotional, June 3, 2018), HopeofIsrael.ChurchofJesusChrist.org; Russell M. Nelson, “The Gathering of Scattered Israel,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2006, 79–82.

22. Psalm 80:1.

we love Him, as He did with Simon Peter, our Savior implores: “Feed my lambs. ... Feed my sheep. ... Feed my sheep.”²³ The Lord promises that when His shepherds feed His lambs and sheep, those in His fold “shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking.”²⁴

Our Good Shepherd cautions that shepherds in Israel must not slumber,²⁵ nor scatter or cause the sheep to go astray,²⁶ nor look our own way for our own gain.²⁷ God’s shepherds are to strengthen, heal, bind up that which is broken, bring again that which was driven away, seek that which was lost.²⁸

The Lord also warns of hirelings, who “careth not for the sheep,”²⁹ and “false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.”³⁰

Our Good Shepherd rejoices when we exercise individual moral agency with intention and faith. Those in His fold look to our Savior in gratitude for His atoning sacrifice. We covenant to follow Him, not passively, blindly, or “sheepishly,” but instead desiring with all our hearts and minds to love God and our neighbor, bearing one another’s burdens and rejoicing in one another’s joys. As Christ freely dedicated His will to the will of the Father, so we reverently take upon us His name. We gladly seek to join His work of gathering and ministering to all of God’s children.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ is our perfect Good Shepherd. Because He has laid down His life for us and is now gloriously resurrected, Jesus Christ is also the perfect Lamb of God.³¹

The sacrificial Lamb of God was foreshadowed from the beginning. The angel told Adam his sacrifice “is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father,” which invites us to “repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore.”³²

23. John 21:15–17; see also the entire chapter.

24. Jeremiah 23:4.

25. See Nahum 3:18.

26. See Jeremiah 23:1; 50:6, 44.

27. See Isaiah 56:11; Ezekiel 34:2–6.

28. See Ezekiel 34:2–6.

29. John 10:13.

30. 3 Nephi 14:15; see also Matthew 7:15; Alma 5:60.

31. See 2 Nephi 9:10–12. By conquering physical death and spiritual separation, the Lamb of God makes possible the gathering of all so there is, in time and eternity, one Shepherd.

32. Moses 5:7–8.

Father Abraham, who established covenant blessings for all the nations of the earth, experienced what it meant to offer his begotten son.

“And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb ... ?

“And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb.”³³

Apostles and prophets foresaw and rejoiced in the foreordained mission of the Lamb of God. John in the Old World and Nephi in the New World testified of “the Lamb of God,”³⁴ “yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father[,] ... the Redeemer of the world.”³⁵

Abinadi testified of Jesus Christ’s atoning sacrifice: “All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the [iniquity] of us all.”³⁶

Alma called the great and last sacrifice of the Son of God the “one thing which is of more importance than they all.” Alma encouraged, “Have faith on the Lamb of God”; “come and fear not.”³⁷

A dear friend shared how she gained her precious testimony of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. She grew up believing sin always brought great punishment, borne by us alone. She pleaded to God to understand the possibility of divine forgiveness. She prayed to understand and know how Jesus Christ can forgive those who repent, how mercy can satisfy justice.

One day her prayer was answered in a spiritually transforming experience. A desperate young man came running out of a grocery store carrying two bags of stolen food. He ran into a busy street, chased by the store manager, who caught him and began yelling and fighting. Instead of feeling judgment for the frightened young man as a thief, my friend was unexpectedly filled with great compassion for him. Without fear or concern for her own safety, she walked straight up to the two quarreling

33. Genesis 22:7–8; see also Jacob 4:5.

34. John 1:29; 1 Nephi 11:21.

35. 1 Nephi 11:21, 27.

36. Mosiah 14:6; see also Isaiah 53:6.

37. Alma 7:7, 14–15.

men. She found herself saying, “I will pay for the food. Please let him go. Please let me pay for the food.”

Prompted by the Holy Ghost and filled with a love she had never felt before, my friend said, “All I wanted to do was to help and save the young man.” My friend said she began to understand Jesus Christ and His Atonement — how and why with pure and perfect love Jesus Christ would willingly sacrifice to be her Savior and Redeemer, and why she wanted Him to be.³⁸

No wonder we sing:

*See, the Good Shepherd is seeking,
Seeking the lambs that are lost,
Bringing them in with rejoicing,
Saved at such infinite cost.*³⁹

As Lamb of God, our Savior knows when we feel alone, diminished, uncertain, or afraid. In vision, Nephi saw the power of the Lamb of God “[descend] upon the saints of the church of the Lamb, and upon the covenant people of the Lord.” Though “scattered upon all the face of the earth ... they were armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory.”⁴⁰

This promise of hope and comfort includes our day.

Are you the only member of the Church in your family, school, workplace, or community? Does your branch sometimes feel small or isolated? Have you moved to a new place, perhaps with an unfamiliar language or customs? Perhaps your life’s circumstances have changed, and things you never thought

38. Conversation with Pornthip “Tippy” Coyle, Feb. 2019, used with permission.

39. “Dear to the Heart of the Shepherd,” *Hymns*, 221. Other *Hymns* that highlight our Shepherd and His sheep include the following: “The Lord My Pasture Will Prepare,” *Hymns*, 109: The Lord my pasture will prepare And feed me with a shepherd’s care. His presence will my wants supply, And guard me with a watchful eye. My noonday walks he will attend And all my silent midnight hours defend. “Help Me Teach with Inspiration,” *Hymns*, 281: Help me find thy lambs who wander; Help me bring

them to thy keep. Teach me, Lord, to be a shepherd; Father, help me feed thy sheep. “Come, All Ye Sons of God,” *Hymns*, 322: The latter-day work has begun, To gather scattered Israel in, And bring them back to Zion to praise the Lamb. Come, all ye scattered sheep, and listen to your Shepherd.

40. 1 Nephi 14:14; see also 1 Nephi 13:35, 37: “Plain and precious [writings shall] ... come forth ... by the gift and power of the Lamb. ... If [we] endure unto the end ... [we] shall be saved in the everlasting kingdom of the Lamb.”

41. Isaiah 40:11.

possible now confront you? Our Savior assures us, whatever our circumstances, whoever we are, in the words of Isaiah: “He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.”⁴¹

Brothers and sisters, our Good Shepherd calls us in His voice and in His name. He seeks, gathers, and comes to His people. Through His living prophet and each of us, He invites all to find peace, purpose, healing, and joy in the fulness of His restored gospel and on His covenant path. By example, He teaches the shepherds of Israel to minister in His love.

As Lamb of God, Jesus’s divine mission was foreordained and rejoiced in by apostles and prophets. His Atonement, infinite and eternal, is central to the plan of happiness and the purpose of creation. He assures us that He carries us next to His heart.

Dear brothers and sisters, may we desire to be “humble followers of God and the Lamb,”⁴² perhaps someday to have our names written in the Lamb’s book of life,⁴³ to sing the song of the Lamb,⁴⁴ to be invited to the supper of the Lamb.⁴⁵

As Shepherd and Lamb, He calls, Come again “to the true knowledge ... of [your] Redeemer, ... [your] great and true shepherd.”⁴⁶ He promises that “by his grace [we] may [become] perfect in Christ.”⁴⁷

At this Easter season, we praise Him:

“Worthy is the Lamb!”⁴⁸

“Hosanna to God and the Lamb!”⁴⁹

I testify of Him, our perfect Good Shepherd, the perfect Lamb of God. He calls us by our name, in His name — even the sacred and holy name of Jesus Christ — amen.

42. Helaman 6:5.

43. See Revelation 21:27.

44. See Revelation 15:3; Doctrine and Covenants 133:56.

45. See Revelation 19:9; Doctrine and Covenants 58:11; see also Revelation 7:17: “For the Lamb ... shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their

eyes”; Revelation 22:1: The “pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.”

46. Helaman 15:13.

47. See Moroni 10:32–33.

48. Revelation 5:12.

49. Doctrine and Covenants 109:79.

Prepared to Obtain Every Needful Thing

By Elder David A. Bednar
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



Blessings will come as we strive to fulfill our individual responsibility to learn and love the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

THE PROGRAMS AND activities of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are becoming ever more home centered and Church supported, as evidenced by the series of adjustments announced in recent general conferences. President Russell M. Nelson has counseled us: “There is much more to come. ... Eat your vitamin pills. Get your rest. It’s going to be exciting.”¹

I pray for and invite the help of the Holy Ghost as we consider together several basic implications of these ongoing adjustments in the Lord’s restored Church.

Home-Centered and Church-Supported Gospel Learning

Elder Craig C. Christensen and I were companions recently in a priesthood leadership conference, and he used two simple questions to emphasize the principle of becoming home centered and Church supported. He suggested that instead of returning to our homes after Church meetings on Sunday and asking, “What did you learn about the Savior and His gospel today at church?” we should ask in our Church meetings, “What did you learn about the Savior and His gospel this week in your

1. Russell M. Nelson, in “Latter-day Saint Prophet, Wife and Apostle Share Insights of Global Ministry,”

Newsroom, Oct. 30, 2018, newsroom.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.

home?” Proper Sabbath-day observance, the new curriculum, and the adjusted meeting schedule all help us to learn the gospel both in our homes and at church.

Each member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has an individual responsibility to learn and live the Lord’s teachings and to receive by proper authority the ordinances of salvation and exaltation. We should not expect the Church as an organization to teach or tell us everything we need to know and do to become devoted disciples and endure valiantly to the end.² Rather, our personal responsibility is to learn what we should learn, to live as we know we should live, and to become who the Master would have us become. And our homes are the ultimate setting for learning, living, and becoming.

As a child, Joseph Smith learned of God from his family. His efforts to discover God’s will for him caused Joseph to search for the truth among many different Christian denominations, ponder diligently the scriptures, and pray sincerely to God. As young Joseph Smith returned to his home from the Sacred Grove immediately after the appearance of the Father and the Son, he spoke first with his mother. As he “leaned up to the fireplace, [his] mother inquired what the matter was. [Joseph] replied, ‘Never mind, all is well — I am well enough off.’ [He] then said to [his] mother, ‘I have learned for myself.’”³ Joseph’s experience provides a powerful pattern of learning that each of us should emulate. We too need to learn for ourselves.

The overarching purpose of Heavenly Father’s plan is for His children to become more like Him. Accordingly, He provides us with essential opportunities to grow and progress. Our commitment to learn and live according to truth is increasingly important in a world that is “in commotion”⁴ and is ever more confused and wicked. We cannot expect simply to attend Church meetings and participate in programs and thereby receive all of the spiritual edification and protection that will enable us “to withstand in the evil day.”⁵

2. See Doctrine and Covenants 121:29.

3. Joseph Smith—History 1:20.

4. Doctrine and Covenants 45:26.

5. Ephesians 6:13.

“Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness.”⁶ Inspired Church leaders, teachers, and activities help individual and family efforts to grow spiritually. And though we all need help pressing forward on the covenant path, the ultimate responsibility for developing spiritual strength and stamina rests upon each one of us.

Recall how Nephi, son of the prophet Lehi, desired to see, hear, and know for himself by the power of the Holy Ghost the things his father had learned in the vision of the tree of life. Nephi clearly needed and was blessed in his youth by the example and teachings of his “goodly parents.”⁷ Yet, just like Joseph Smith, he yearned to learn and know for himself.

If all you or I know about Jesus Christ and His restored gospel is what other people teach or tell us, then the foundation of our testimony of Him and His glorious latter-day work is built upon sand.⁸ We cannot rely exclusively upon or borrow gospel light and knowledge from other people — even those whom we love and trust.

Significantly, the Prophet Joseph Smith taught that each Latter-day Saint needs to understand for himself or herself “the designs and purposes of God in our coming into the world.”⁹

“Could we read and comprehend all that has been written from the days of Adam, on the relation of man to God and angels in a future state, we should know very little about it. Reading the experience of others, or the revelation given to them, can never give us a comprehensive view of our condition and true relation to God. *Knowledge of these things can only be obtained by experience through the ordinances of God set forth for that purpose.*”¹⁰

Enabling the accomplishment of this grand spiritual objective for individuals and families is one of the fundamental reasons the programs and activities of The Church of Jesus Christ of

6. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2017, 145.

7. 1 Nephi 1:1.

8. See Matthew 7:24–27; 3 Nephi 14:24–27; 18:13.

9. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 211.

10. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 419; emphasis added.

Latter-day Saints are becoming more home centered and Church supported in this specific season of the dispensation of the fulness of times.

Implications of Home-Centered and Church-Supported Learning

Let me summarize a few basic implications of gospel learning becoming increasingly home centered and Church supported.

The ultimate missionary training center is in our homes; secondary missionary training centers are located in Provo, Manila, Mexico City, and in other locations. Our most instructive Sunday School classes should be our individual and family study in our places of residence; helpful but secondary Sunday School classes are held in our meetinghouses.

Family history centers now are in our homes. Supplemental support for our family history research work also is available in our meetinghouses.

Vital temple preparation classes occur in our homes; important but secondary temple preparation classes also may be conducted periodically in our meetinghouses.

Making our homes sanctuaries wherein we can “stand in holy places”¹¹ is essential in these latter days. And as important as home-centered and Church-supported learning is for our spiritual strength and protection today, it will be even more vital in the future.

Home-Centered and Church-Supported Learning and Temple Preparation

Please consider how the principle of “home centered and Church supported” applies to our individual preparation and worthiness to receive sacred ordinances and covenants in the house of the Lord.

Indeed, temple preparation is most effective in our homes. But many Church members are unsure about what appropriately

11. Doctrine and Covenants 101:22.

can and cannot be said regarding the temple experience outside of the temple.

President Ezra Taft Benson described why this uncertainty exists:

“The temple is a sacred place, and the ordinances in the temple are of a sacred character. Because of its sacredness we are sometimes reluctant to say anything about the temple to our children and grandchildren.

“As a consequence, many do not develop a real desire to go to the temple, or when they go there, they do so without much background to prepare them for the obligations and covenants they enter into.

“I believe a proper understanding or background will immeasurably help prepare our youth for the temple ... [and] will foster within them a desire to seek their priesthood blessings just as Abraham sought his.”¹²

Two basic guidelines can help us achieve the proper understanding emphasized by President Benson.

Guideline #1. *Because we love the Lord, we always should speak about His holy house with reverence. We should not disclose or describe the special symbols associated with the covenants we receive in sacred temple ceremonies. Neither should we discuss the holy information that we specifically promise in the temple not to reveal.*

Guideline #2. *The temple is the house of the Lord. Everything in the temple points us to our Savior, Jesus Christ. We may discuss the basic purposes of and the doctrine and principles associated with temple ordinances and covenants.*

President Howard W. Hunter counseled: “Let us share with our children the spiritual feelings we have in the temple. And let us teach them more earnestly and more comfortably the things we can appropriately say about the purposes of the house of the Lord.”¹³

12. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Ezra Taft Benson* (2014), 174; emphasis added; see also Ezra Taft Benson, “What I Hope You Will Teach Your

Children about the Temple,” *Ensign*, Aug. 1985, 8.

13. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Howard W. Hunter* (2015), 184.

Across the generations, from the Prophet Joseph Smith to President Russell M. Nelson, the doctrinal purposes of temple ordinances and covenants have been taught extensively by Church leaders.¹⁴ A rich reservoir of resources exists in print, audio, video, and other formats to help us learn about initiatory ordinances, endowments, marriages, and other sealing ordinances.¹⁵ Information also is available about following the Savior by receiving and honoring covenants to keep the law of obedience, the law of sacrifice, the law of the gospel, the law of chastity, and the law of consecration.¹⁶ All Church members should become familiar with the excellent materials available at temples.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.

President Russell M. Nelson emphasized the vital balance between the sacred nature of temple ceremonies and the valuable information about temples published by the Church that is accurate, appropriate, and available publicly. He explained: “I recommend that members ... read entries in the Bible Dictionary that are related to the temple, such as ‘Anoint,’ ‘Covenant,’ ‘Sacrifices,’ and ‘Temple.’ One may also wish to read Exodus, chapters 26–29, and Leviticus, chapter 8. The Old Testament, as well as the books of Moses and Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price, underscores the antiquity of temple work and the enduring nature of its ordinances.”¹⁷

So, imagine that your son or daughter asks, “Someone at school told me that strange clothing is worn in the temple. Is that right?” A short video is available on temples.ChurchofJesusChrist.org entitled “Sacred Temple Clothing.” This excellent resource explains how from ancient times men and women have embraced sacred music, different forms of prayer, symbolic religious clothing, gestures, and rituals to express their innermost feelings of devotion to God. Thus, the Church

14. See, for example, James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord* (1912), 99–101.

15. See James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord*, 89–109; Russell M. Nelson, “Personal Preparation for Temple Blessings,” *Ensign*, May 2001, 32–34; *Liahona*, July 2001, 37–39; Boyd K. Packer, *The Holy Temple* (1980), 153–55.

16. See *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (1988), 121; James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord*, 100; *Preparing to Enter the Holy Temple* (pamphlet, 2002).

17. Russell M. Nelson, “Prepare for the Blessings of the Temple,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Oct. 2010, 47.

supports home-centered preparation for the glorious blessings of the temple through basic instruction and remarkable resources such as this video. Much useful information is available to you.¹⁸

As we strive to walk in the meekness of the Lord's Spirit,¹⁹ we will be blessed to understand and achieve in our homes the necessary balance between what is and what is not appropriate to discuss about sacred temple ordinances and covenants.

Promise and Testimony

I suspect that some of you may be wondering if your gospel learning actually can become home centered and Church supported. Perhaps you are the only member of the Church in your home, or have an unsupportive spouse, or are a single parent, or live alone as a single or divorced Latter-day Saint, and you may have questions about how these principles apply to you. You may be a husband and a wife looking at each other and questioning, "Can we do this?"

Yes, you can do this! I promise that enabling blessings will flow into and be evident in your life. Doors will open. The light will shine. Your capacity will be increased to persevere diligently and patiently.

I joyfully witness that compensating blessings will come as we strive to fulfill our individual responsibility to learn and love the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. We truly can "be prepared to obtain every needful thing."²⁰ I so promise and testify in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

18. For example, watch a video tour of the Rome Italy Temple, or study prophetic teachings on temples (see temples.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).

19. See Doctrine and Covenants 19:23.

20. Doctrine and Covenants 109:15.

The Immediate Goodness of God

By Elder Kyle S. McKay
Of the Seventy



Even while we are patiently waiting upon the Lord, there are certain blessings that come to us immediately.

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, our five-year-old son came to me and announced, “Dad, I’ve figured something out. I’ve figured out that *soon* for you is a very long time for me.”

When the Lord or His servants say things like, “Not many days hence” or “The time is not far distant,” it can literally mean a lifetime or longer.¹ His time, and frequently His timing, is different from ours. Patience is key. Without it, we can neither develop nor demonstrate faith in God unto life and salvation. But my message today is that, even while we are patiently waiting upon the Lord, there are certain blessings that come to us immediately.

When Alma and his people were captured by the Lamanites, they prayed for deliverance. They were not immediately delivered, but while they patiently waited for deliverance, the Lord showed forth His goodness with certain immediate blessings. He immediately softened the hearts of the Lamanites so they wouldn’t slay them. He also strengthened Alma’s people and eased their burdens.² When they finally were delivered, they traveled to Zarahemla, where they recounted their experience to an amazed audience. The people of Zarahemla marveled, and “when they thought of the *immediate goodness of God*, and

1. See, for example, Alma 7:7; 9:26; Doctrine and Covenants 88:87.

2. See Mosiah 23:28–29; 24:14–15.

his power in delivering Alma and his brethren out of ... bondage, they did raise their voices and give thanks to God.”³

The immediate goodness of God comes to all who call upon Him with real intent and full purpose of heart. This includes those who cry out in earnest desperation, when deliverance seems so distant and suffering seems prolonged, even intensified.

So it was with a young prophet who suffered to the brink in the dank of a dungeon before finally crying out: “O God, where art thou? ... How long shall thy hand be stayed ... ? Yea, O Lord, how long ... ?”⁴ In response, the Lord did not immediately deliver Joseph, but He did immediately pronounce peace.⁵

God also gives immediate hope for eventual deliverance.⁶ No matter what, no matter where, in Christ and through Christ there is always hope smiling brightly before us.⁷ Immediately before us.

Moreover, He has promised, “My kindness shall not depart from thee.”⁸

Above all, God’s love is immediate. With Paul, I testify that nothing can “separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus.”⁹ Even our sins, though they may separate us from His Spirit for a time, cannot separate us from the constancy and immediacy of His divine paternal love.

These are some of the ways and means by which “he doth immediately bless [us].”¹⁰ Now, to bring these principles current and close, I share with you the experiences of two people whose lives stand as testaments of the immediate goodness of God.

Emilie

From the time she was a young teen, Emilie struggled with substance abuse. Experimentation led to habit, and habit eventually hardened into an addiction that held her captive for

3. Mosiah 25:10; emphasis added.

4. Doctrine and Covenants 121:1–3.

5. See Doctrine and Covenants 121:7.

6. See Alma 58:11: “Yea, and it came to pass that the Lord our God did visit us with assurances that he would deliver us; yea, ... and did cause us that we should hope for our deliverance in

him.” See also Doctrine and Covenants 121:7–8.

7. See “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet,” *Hymns*, 19.

8. Isaiah 54:10; emphasis added.

9. Romans 8:39.

10. Mosiah 2:24.

years, notwithstanding occasional periods of wellness. Emilie carefully concealed her problem, especially after she became a wife and mother.

The beginning of her deliverance did not feel like deliverance at all. One minute, Emilie was undergoing a routine medical exam, and the next, she was being driven by ambulance to an inpatient treatment facility. She began to panic as she thought of being separated from her children, her husband, her home.

That night, alone in a cold, dark room, Emilie curled up on her bed and sobbed. Her ability to reason diminished until finally, overcome with anxiety, fear, and the oppressive darkness in that room and in her soul, Emilie actually thought she would die that night. Alone.

In that desperate condition, Emilie somehow summoned the strength to roll off the bed and onto her knees. Without any posturing that had sometimes been part of previous prayers, Emilie completely surrendered herself to the Lord as she desperately pleaded, “Dear God, I need You. Please help me. I don’t want to be alone. Please get me through this night.”

And immediately, as He had done with Peter of old, Jesus stretched forth His hand and caught her sinking soul.¹¹ There came over Emilie a wondrous calm, courage, assurance, and love. The room was no longer cold, she knew she was not alone, and for the first time since she was 14 years old, Emilie knew everything would be all right. As she “awoke unto God,”¹² Emilie fell asleep in peace. And thus we see that “if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you.”¹³

Emilie’s healing and ultimate deliverance took a long time — months of treatment, training, and counseling, during which she was sustained and sometimes carried by His goodness. And that goodness continued with her as she entered the temple with her husband and children to be sealed together forever. Like the people of Zarahemla, Emilie now gives thanks as she reflects on

11. See Matthew 14:31.

12. Alma 5:7.

13. Alma 34:31.

the immediate goodness of God and His power in delivering her from bondage.

Alicia

Now, from the life of another brave believer. On December 27, 2013, Alicia Schroeder joyfully welcomed her dear friends Sean and Sharla Chilcote, who unexpectedly showed up on her doorstep. Sean, who was also Alicia's bishop, handed her his cell phone and solemnly said, "Alicia, we love you. You need to take this call."

Alicia's husband, Mario, was on the phone. He was in a remote area with some of their children on a long-anticipated snowmobile trip. There had been a terrible accident. Mario was seriously injured, and their 10-year-old son, Kaleb, was gone. When Mario tearfully told Alicia of Kaleb's death, she was overcome with a shock and horror few of us will ever know. It dropped her. Paralyzed with unspeakable anguish, Alicia could neither move nor speak.

Bishop and Sister Chilcote quickly lifted her up and held her. They wept and deeply grieved together for some time. Then Bishop Chilcote offered to give Alicia a blessing.

What happened next is incomprehensible without some understanding of the Atonement of Jesus Christ and the immediate goodness of God. Bishop Chilcote gently placed his hands on Alicia's head and, with quivering voice, began to speak. Alicia heard two things as though spoken by God Himself. First, she heard her name, Alicia Susan Schroeder. Then she heard the bishop invoke the authority of Almighty God. In that instant — at the mere utterance of her name and God's power — Alicia was filled with an indescribable peace, love, comfort, and somehow *joy*. And it has continued with her.

Now, of course, Alicia, Mario, and their family still mourn for and miss Kaleb. It is *hard*! Whenever I speak with her, Alicia's eyes well up with tears as she tells how much she loves and misses her little boy. And her eyes remain moist as she tells how the Great Deliverer has sustained her through every bit of her ordeal, beginning with His immediate goodness during her deepest

despair and continuing now with the bright hope of a sweet reunion that is “not many days hence.”

I realize that sometimes life’s experiences create confusion and turbulence that can make it difficult to receive or recognize or retain the kind of relief that came to Emilie and Alicia. I have been through such times. I testify that, during such times, our mere preservation is a tender and powerful manifestation of the immediate goodness of God. Remember, ancient Israel was ultimately delivered “by that same God who had preserved them”¹⁴ day to day.

I bear witness that Jesus Christ is the Great Deliverer, and in His name, I promise that as you turn to Him with real intent and full purpose of heart, He will deliver you from everything that threatens to diminish or destroy your life or joy. That deliverance may take longer than you would like — perhaps a lifetime or longer. So, to give you comfort, courage, and hope, to sustain and strengthen you to that day of ultimate deliverance, I commend to you and testify of *the immediate goodness of God* in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

14. 1 Nephi 5:15.

Build a Fortress of Spirituality and Protection

By Elder Ronald A. Rasband
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



When we live the gospel of Jesus Christ, when we draw upon the Savior's Atonement and press forward with faith, we are fortified against the adversary.

MY DEAR BROTHERS and sisters, as this conference comes to a close, I give thanks to our Father in Heaven for the counsel, truths, and revelation shared at this pulpit during the past two days. We have been taught by servants of God called to speak His holy words. The Lord has reminded us in latter-day revelation, “Whether by mine own voice or ... the voice of my servants, it is the same.”¹

Looking over this vast congregation of Saints and picturing members watching general conference all over the world, I think of the gathering in the Book of Mormon when Jesus Christ appeared to the Nephites following His Crucifixion. He taught them the gospel and then encouraged, “Go ye unto your homes, and ponder upon the things which I have said, and ask of the Father, in my name, that ye may understand.”²

“Go ye unto your homes, and ponder” is the next step in taking to heart the words of prophets and Church leaders spoken in this sacred setting. Christ-centered homes are fortresses for the kingdom of God on earth in a day when, as prophesied, the devil

1. Doctrine and Covenants 1:38.

2. 3 Nephi 17:3.

“rage[s] in the hearts of the children of men, and stir[s] them up to anger against that which is good.”³

People have built fortresses throughout history to keep the enemy outside. Often those fortresses included a guard tower where watchmen — like prophets — warned of menacing forces and coming attacks.

In early Utah pioneer times, my great-grandfather Thomas Rasband and his family were some of the first settlers to enter the Heber Valley in the beautiful Wasatch Mountains of Utah.

In 1859, Thomas helped construct the Heber fort, built for their protection. It was a simple structure of cottonwood logs positioned one next to the other, forming the perimeter of the fort. Log cabins were built inside the fortress using that common wall. The structure provided both security and safety for those pioneer families as they put down roots and worshipped the Lord.

So it is with us. Our homes are fortresses against the evils of the world. In our homes we come unto Christ by learning to follow His commandments, by studying the scriptures and praying together, and by helping one another stay on the covenant path. The new emphasis on personal and family study in the home through the curriculum Come, Follow Me is designed “to deepen our conversion and help us become more like Jesus Christ.”⁴ In so doing we will become what Paul called “new creature[s]”⁵ with our hearts and souls in tune with God. We need that strength to face and deflect the assaults of the adversary.

As we live with devotion born of faith in Jesus Christ, we will feel the peaceful presence of the Holy Ghost, who guides us to truth, inspires us to live worthy of the Lord’s blessings, and bears witness that God lives and loves us. All this within the fortress of our own homes. But remember, our homes are only as powerful as the spiritual strength of each one of us within the walls.

3. 2 Nephi 28:20.

4. Come, Follow Me—For Individuals and Families: New Testament 2019, v.

5. 2 Corinthians 5:17.

President Russell M. Nelson has taught, “In coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost.”⁶

As the Lord’s living prophet, seer, and revelator in this day, the watchman on the tower of our fortress, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he sees the advances of the enemy.

Brothers and sisters, we are at war with Satan for the souls of men. The battle lines were drawn in our pre-earth life. Satan and a third of our Father in Heaven’s children turned away from His promises of exaltation. Since that time, the adversary’s minions have been fighting the faithful who choose the Father’s plan.

Satan knows his days are numbered and that time is growing shorter. As crafty and cunning as he is, he will not win. However, his battle for each one of our souls rages on.

For our safety, we must build a fortress of spirituality and protection for our very souls, a fortress that will not be penetrated by the evil one.

Satan is a subtle snake, sneaking into our minds and hearts when we have let our guard down, faced a disappointment, or lost hope. He entices us with flattery, a promise of ease, comfort, or a temporary high when we are low. He justifies pride, unkindness, dishonesty, discontent, and immorality, and in time we can be “past feeling.”⁷ The Spirit can leave us. “And thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell.”⁸

In contrast, we often feel the Spirit so powerfully as we sing praises to God with words like these:

*A mighty fortress is our God,
A tower of strength ne’er failing.
A helper mighty is our God,
O’er ills of life prevailing.⁹*

When we build a fortress of spiritual strength, we can shun the advances of the adversary, turn our backs on him, and feel the

6. Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2018, 96.

7. 1 Nephi 17:45.

8. 2 Nephi 28:21.

9. “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” *Hymns*, 68.

peace of the Spirit. We can follow the example of our Lord and Savior, who, when tempted in the wilderness, said, “Get thee behind me, Satan.”¹⁰ We each have to learn by the experiences of life how to do that.

Such righteous purpose is well described in the Book of Mormon when Captain Moroni prepared the Nephites to face attacks from a deceitful, bloodthirsty, power-hungry Amalickiah. Moroni constructed fortresses to protect the Nephites “that they might live unto the Lord their God, and that they might maintain that which was called by their enemies the cause of Christians.”¹¹ Moroni “was firm in the faith of Christ”¹² and was faithful “in keeping the commandments of God ... and resisting iniquity.”¹³

When the Lamanites came to battle, they were astonished by the Nephites’ preparation, and they were defeated. The Nephites thanked “the Lord their God, because of his matchless power in delivering them from the hands of their enemies.”¹⁴ They had built fortresses for protection on the outside, and they had built faith in the Lord Jesus Christ on the inside — deep in their souls.

What are some ways we can fortify ourselves in troubled times, that we may be “instruments in the hands of God to bring about this great work”?¹⁵ Let’s look to the scriptures.

We are obedient. The Lord commanded Father Lehi to send his sons back to Jerusalem to “seek the records, and bring them down hither into the wilderness.”¹⁶ Lehi didn’t question; he didn’t wonder why or how. Nor did Nephi, who responded, “I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded.”¹⁷

Do we act with the willing obedience of Nephi? Or are we more inclined to question God’s commands as did Nephi’s brothers, whose lack of faith eventually turned them away from the Lord? Obedience, exercised with “holiness of heart,”¹⁸ is what the Lord asks of us.

10. Luke 4:8.

11. Alma 48:10.

12. Alma 48:13.

13. Alma 48:16.

14. Alma 49:28.

15. Alma 26:3.

16. 1 Nephi 3:4.

17. 1 Nephi 3:7.

18. Doctrine and Covenants 46:7.

We trust the Lord, who said to Joshua as he prepared to lead the Israelites into the promised land, “Be strong and of ... good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.”¹⁹ Joshua trusted those words and counseled the people, “Sanctify yourselves: for to morrow the Lord will do wonders among you.”²⁰ The Lord parted the waters of the Jordan, and the Israelites’ 40 years of wandering in the wilderness ended.

We stand for the truth, as did the prophet Abinadi in the Book of Mormon. Arrested, brought before King Noah and his wicked priests, Abinadi taught the Ten Commandments and preached powerfully that Christ would “come down among the children of men, and ... redeem his people.”²¹ He then, with faith deep within him, proclaimed, “O God, receive my soul,”²² and Abinadi “suffered death by fire.”²³

We make and renew our covenants by partaking of the sacrament and by worshipping in the temple. The sacrament is the centerpiece of our Sunday worship, where we are receiving the promise to “always have his Spirit to be with [us].”²⁴ With that sacred ordinance we commit to take upon us the name of Jesus Christ, to follow Him, and to shoulder our responsibilities in this divine work as He did. In the temple we can “lay aside the things of this world”²⁵ and feel the Lord’s presence and His transcendent peace. We can focus on our ancestors, our families, and eternal life in the presence of the Father. No wonder President Nelson stated recently in Rome, “The good that will emanate from this temple is incalculably great.”²⁶

We should have integrity in all that we do. We should develop discernment and discipline so that we do not have to continually determine what is right and what is wrong. We should take to heart the words of Peter, the early Church Apostle, who cautioned, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your

19. Joshua 1:9.

20. Joshua 3:5.

21. Mosiah 15:1.

22. Mosiah 17:19.

23. Mosiah 17:20.

24. Doctrine and Covenants 20:77.

25. Doctrine and Covenants 25:10.

26. Russell M. Nelson, in Tad Walch, “President Nelson Refers to Apostles Peter, Paul during Rome Temple Dedication,” *Deseret News*, Mar. 10, 2019, deseretnews.com.

adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”²⁷

As we diligently strengthen our fortifications, we become like Jesus Christ, as His true disciples, with our very souls in His protection.

Your testimony of Jesus Christ is your personal fortress, the security for your soul. When my great-grandfather and his fellow pioneers built the Heber fort, they put up one log at a time until the fort was “fitly framed together”²⁸ and they were protected. So it is with testimony. One by one we gain a witness from the Holy Spirit as He speaks to our own spirit, teaching “truth in the inward parts.”²⁹ When we live the gospel of Jesus Christ, when we draw upon the Savior’s Atonement and press forward with faith, not fear, we are fortified against the wiles of the adversary. Our testimonies connect us to the heavens, and we are blessed with “the truth of all things.”³⁰ And, like pioneers protected by a fortress, we are safely encircled in the arms of the Savior’s love.

The prophet Ether taught,

“Wherefore, whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God.”³¹

My dear brothers and sisters, I leave you with my blessing to go forth with confidence in the Lord and in His gospel. Put your arms around those who stumble and, with the strength of the Spirit within you, lead them lovingly back to the fortress of spirituality and protection. Seek “to be like Jesus”³² in all that you do; shun evil and temptations; repent, as we were admonished yesterday by our dear prophet; be honest in heart; be upright and pure; show compassion and charity; and love the Lord your God with the devotion of a true disciple.

27. 1 Peter 5:8.

28. Ephesians 2:21.

29. Psalm 51:6.

30. Moroni 10:5.

31. Ether 12:4.

32. “I’m Trying to Be like Jesus,”
Children’s Songbook, 78.

Our testimonies of the gospel of Jesus Christ, our homes, our families, and our membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will be our personal fortresses of protection surrounding us and shielding us from the power of the evil one. Of this I bear my solemn witness in the name of our Lord and Savior, even Jesus Christ, amen.

Closing Remarks

By President Russell M. Nelson

May we dedicate and rededicate our lives to serving God and His children — on both sides of the veil.



MY BELOVED BROTHERS and sisters, as we come to the end of this historic conference, we thank the Lord for His inspiration and protection. The messages have instructed and edified us.

Topics were not assigned to the speakers. They each prayed for personal revelation in preparing their messages. To me, it is remarkable how those themes seem to fit so well with each other. As you study them, seek to learn what the Lord is trying to teach *you* through His servants.

The music has been glorious. We are deeply grateful to the many musicians who have blended their talents to bring the Spirit of the Lord into each session. And He has blessed the prayers and the congregations in every session. Truly, conference has again been a spiritual feast for us all.

We hope and pray that each member's home will become a true sanctuary of faith, where the Spirit of the Lord may dwell. Despite contention all around us, one's home can become a heavenly place, where study, prayer, and faith can be merged with love. We can truly become disciples of the Lord, standing up and speaking up for Him wherever we are.

God's objective should be our objective. He wants His children to *choose* to return to Him, prepared, qualified, endowed, sealed, and faithful to covenants made in holy temples.

We now have 162 dedicated temples. The earliest ones stand as monuments to the faith and vision of our beloved pioneers. Each temple constructed by them resulted from their great

personal sacrifice and effort. Each one stands as a stunning jewel in the crown of pioneer achievement.

Ours is a sacred responsibility to care for them. Therefore, these pioneer temples will soon undergo a period of renewal and refreshing and, for some, a major restoration. Efforts will be made to preserve the unique historicity of each temple wherever possible, preserving the inspiring beauty and unique craftsmanship of generations long-since passed.

Details for the St. George Utah Temple have already been released. Plans for the renovation of the Salt Lake Temple, Temple Square, and the adjoining plaza near the Church Office Building will be announced on Friday, April 19, 2019.

The Manti and Logan Utah Temples will also be renovated in coming years. When those plans are prepared, they too will be announced.

This work will require that each temple be closed for a period of time. Church members may continue to enjoy temple worship and service in other temples nearby. When each project is completed, each historic temple will be rededicated.

Brothers and sisters, we regard a temple as the most sacred structure in the Church. As we announce plans to construct a new temple, it becomes part of our sacred history. Now, please listen carefully and reverently. If I announce a temple in a place that is special to you, may I suggest that you simply bow your head with a silent prayer of gratitude in your heart. We do not want any verbal outbursts to detract from the sacred nature of this conference and the Lord's holy temples.

Today we are pleased to announce plans to construct more temples, to be built in the following locations:

Pago Pago, American Samoa; Okinawa City, Okinawa; Neiafu, Tonga; Tooele Valley, Utah; Moses Lake, Washington; San Pedro Sula, Honduras; Antofagasta, Chile; Budapest, Hungary.

Thank you, my dear brothers and sisters.

As we speak of our temples old and new, may each of us signify by our actions that we are true disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. May we renovate our lives through our faith and trust in Him.

May we access the power of His Atonement by our repentance each day. And may we dedicate and rededicate our lives to serving God and His children — on both sides of the veil.

I leave my love and blessing with you, assuring you that revelation continues in this, the Lord's Church. It will continue until "the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done."¹

I so bless you and bear my testimony that God lives! Jesus is the Christ! This is His Church. We are His people. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 142

