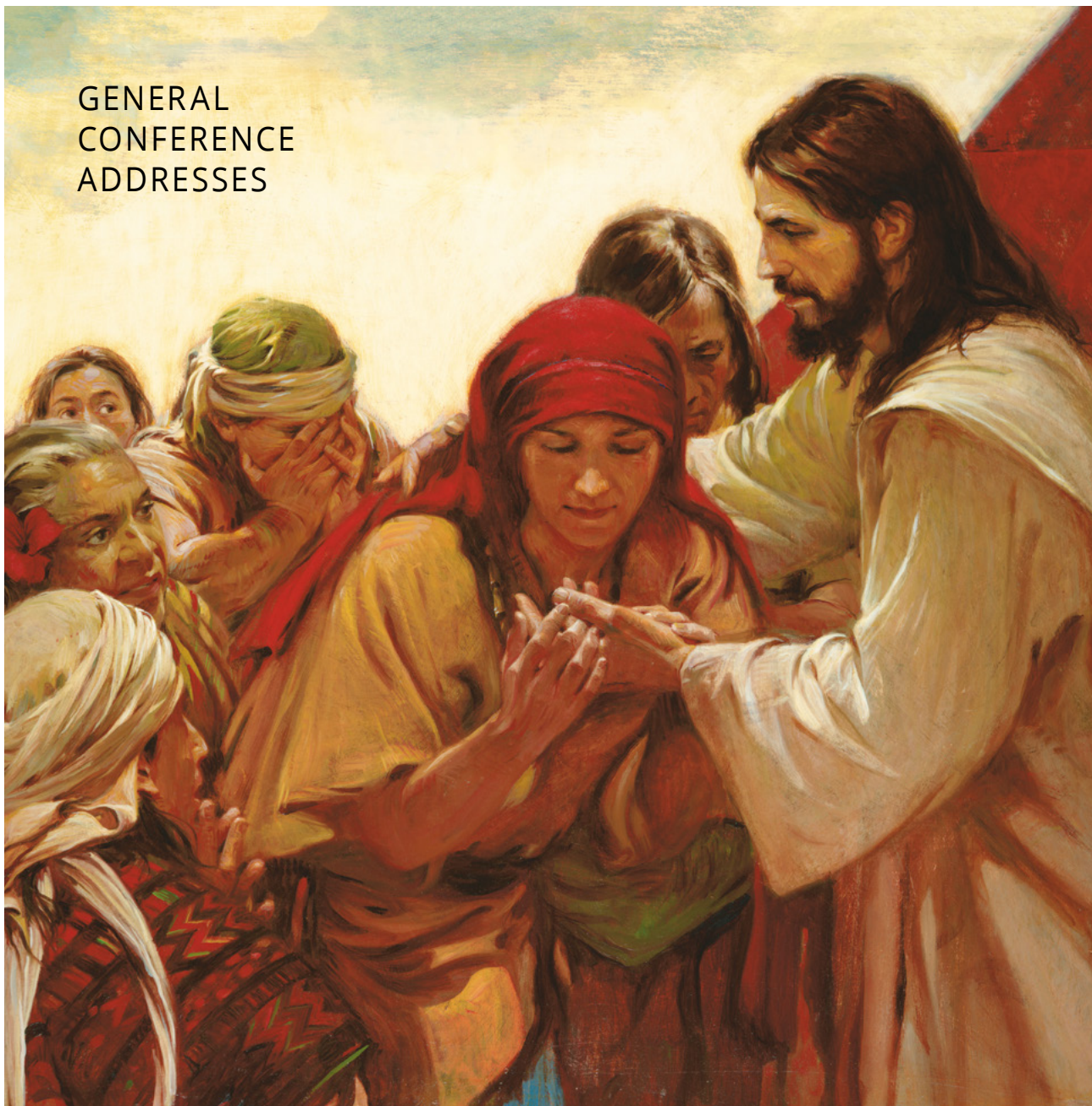


MAY 2024

Liahona

Pointing Us All to Jesus Christ

GENERAL
CONFERENCE
ADDRESSES



President Nelson:
The Divine Gift of
Priesthood Keys

New General Authority Seventies,
Sunday School General
Presidency Sustained

15 New Temples
Announced

“

In the Kirtland Temple in 1836, the conferral of . . . priesthood keys—namely, keys of the gathering of Israel, keys of the gospel of Abraham, and keys of the sealing power—was essential. These keys authorized Joseph Smith—and all succeeding Presidents of the Lord’s Church—to gather Israel on both sides of the veil, to bless all covenant children with the blessings of Abraham, to place a ratifying seal on priesthood ordinances and covenants, and to seal families eternally. The power of these priesthood keys is infinite and breathtaking.

—President Russell M. Nelson, *“Rejoice in the Gift of Priesthood Keys”*

The west pulpits on the first floor of the Kirtland Temple, where Jesus Christ, Moses, Elias, and Elijah appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in 1836.



THE QUORUM OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES



Seated, from left: President Jeffrey R. Holland (Acting President), Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Elder David A. Bednar, Elder Quentin L. Cook, Elder D. Todd Christofferson.

Standing, from left: Elder Neil L. Andersen, Elder Ronald A. Rasband, Elder Gary E. Stevenson, Elder Dale G. Renlund, Elder Gerrit W. Gong, Elder Ulisses Soares, Elder Patrick Kearon.

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Guatemala

The 194th Annual General Conference

Saturday Morning Session, April 6, 2024

Conducting: President Dallin H. Oaks
Invocation: Elder S. Gifford Nielsen
Benediction: Elder Mark D. Eddy
Music by the Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square; Mack Wilberg and Ryan Murphy, directors; Brian Mathias and Andrew Unsworth, organists: “Come, We That Love the Lord,” *Hymns*, no. 119; “The Morning Breaks,” *Hymns*, no. 1, arr. Wilberg; “Did You Think to Pray?,” *Hymns*, no. 140, arr. Wilberg; “Press Forward, Saints,” *Hymns*, no. 81; “I Know That My Savior Loves Me,” Creamer/Bell, arr. Murphy; “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet,” *Hymns*, no. 19, arr. Murphy.

Saturday Afternoon Session, April 6, 2024

Conducting: Elder Gary E. Stevenson
Invocation: Elder Ryan K. Olsen
Benediction: President Emily Belle Freeman
Music by a combined choir from Brigham Young University–Idaho; Paul Busselberg, Randall Kempton, Eda Ashby, and Atina Coates, directors; Joseph Peebles and Linda Margetts, organists: “All Glory, Laud, and Honor,” *Hymns*, no. 69, arr. Busselberg; “God Loved Us, So He Sent His Son,” *Hymns*, no. 187, arr. Busselberg; “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty,” *Hymns*, no. 72; “How Great the Wisdom and the Love,” *Hymns*, no. 195, arr. Ashby; “We Will Sing of Zion,” *Hymns*, no. 47, arr. Kempton.

Saturday Evening Session, April 6, 2024

Conducting: Elder Dale G. Renlund
Invocation: Elder Alfred Kyungu
Benediction: Brother Milton Camargo
Music by the Utah Valley Institute Choir; Matt Johnson and Marshall McDonald, directors; Linda Margetts and Joseph Peebles, organists: “The Lord Is My Light,” *Hymns*, no. 89, arr. Kasen; “Oh, What Songs of the Heart,” *Hymns*, no. 286, arr. Wilberg; “Count Your Blessings,” *Hymns*, no. 241, arr. Mohlman; “Amazing Grace,” Newton/American folk melody, arr. Bradford.

Sunday Morning Session, April 7, 2024

Conducting: President Henry B. Eyring
Invocation: Elder Vaiangina Sikahema
Benediction: Elder Adrián Ochoa
Music by the Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square; Mack Wilberg and Ryan Murphy, directors; Richard Elliott and Brian Mathias, organists: “Awake and Arise,” *Hymns*, no. 8; “Come, Ye Children of the Lord,” *Hymns*, no. 58, arr. Wilberg; “A Child’s Prayer,” *Children’s*

Songbook, 12, arr. Perry; “Redeemer of Israel,” *Hymns*, no. 6; “His Eye Is on the Sparrow,” Martin/Gabriel, arr. Wilberg; “Lord, I Would Follow Thee,” *Hymns*, no. 220; arr. Murphy.

Sunday Afternoon Session, April 7, 2024

Conducting: Elder Quentin L. Cook
Invocation: Elder Carlos G. Revillo Jr.
Benediction: Sister Amy A. Wright
Music by the Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square; Mack Wilberg and Ryan Murphy, directors; Andrew Unsworth and Richard Elliott, organists: “Come, Rejoice,” *Hymns*, no. 9, arr. Murphy; “Softly and Tenderly,” Thompson, arr. Wilberg; “How Firm a Foundation,” *Hymns*, no. 85; “Now Let Us Rejoice,” *Hymns*, no. 3, arr. Wilberg.

Conference Talks Available

General conference talks are available digitally in the Gospel Library app and at conference [.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://www.ChurchofJesusChrist.org). Information on general conference in accessible formats for members with disabilities is available at [disability.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://www.disability.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).

On the Cover

Front: *One by One*, by Walter Rane
Back: Photograph by Leslie Nilsson

Conference Photography

Photographs in Salt Lake City were taken by Cody Bell, Lauren Dellos, Leslie Nilsson, Cristy Powell, Aaron Roome Jr., and Hunter Winterton. **Additional photography** by Luis E. Alvarez, Benson Arudo, Janae Bingham, Shirley Brito, Fernando Calderón, Clayton Chan, Esli Dan Hernandez Gomez, Kristin Grunauer, Cinthia E. Herrera, Stefan Huysmans, Neil Kabiling, Ashlee Larsen, Bárbara Leite, Amelia Lyon, Daniel Martinez, Melanie Miza, Ebick Ngoma, Sayaka Okubo, Miguel Pachas, Valisoa Rakotomanana, Nathan Reid, Melissa Reinhardt, Helen Rose, Alvaro O. de la Quintana S., Stéphane Sayeb, Nicolas Serey, Rodrigo Almedia da Silva, Amanda Steed, Carolina Triana, Zhiyang Tsai, Ntebaleng Twala, and Masada Vuikadavu.

Any uncaptioned photographs were taken at the Conference Center or on Temple Square in Salt Lake City.



Kenya





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

Sustaining of General Authorities, Area Seventies, and General Officers

Brothers and sisters, it will now be my privilege to present the General Authorities, Area Seventies, and General Officers of the Church for your sustaining vote.

Please express your support in the usual way. If there are those who oppose any of the proposals, we ask that you contact your stake president.

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 Jeffrey R. Holland 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: 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, Ulisses Soares, and Patrick Kearon.

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.

The following General Authorities will be released from their assignments and given emeritus status, effective on August 1, 2024: Elders Ian S. Ardern, Shayne M. Bowen, Paul V. Johnson, S. Gifford Nielsen, Brent H. Nielson, Adrián Ochoa, Gary B. Sabin, and Evan A. Schmutz.

Those who wish to express gratitude to these brethren and their wives for their years of dedicated service throughout the Church may do so by the uplifted hand.

We also release Elder Carlos A. Godoy from serving as a member of the Presidency of the Seventy, effective on August 1, 2024.

Those who wish to express appreciation to Elder Godoy for his

service in this capacity may do so.

We note with gratitude the Area Seventies who will complete their service and whose names can be found on the Church's website.

Those who wish to join in expressing appreciation to these brethren and to their families for their years of selfless service may manifest it.

We extend releases to the Sunday School General Presidency, effective on August 1, 2024, as follows: Mark L. Pace as President, Milton Camargo as First Counselor, and Jan E. Newman as Second Counselor.

All who wish to join in expressing appreciation to these brothers for their devoted service may manifest it.

It is proposed that we sustain the following as members of the Presidency of the Seventy: Elder Marcus B. Nash, who began his service in January 2024, and Elders Michael T. Ringwood, Arnulfo Valenzuela, and Edward Dube, who will begin their service on August 1, 2024.

Those in favor may manifest it.

Any opposed may manifest it.

It is proposed that we sustain the following as General Authority Seventies: David L. Buckner, Gregorio E. Casillas, Aroldo B. Cavalcante, I. Raymond Egbo, D. Martin Goury, Karl D. Hirst, Christopher H. Kim, Sandino Roman, Steven D. Shumway, Michael B. Strong, and Sergio R. Vargas.

All in favor, please manifest it.

Those opposed, by the same sign.

We note that 64 new Area Seventies were sustained during the general conference leadership meetings on Thursday, April 4, and then announced on the Church's website. We invite you to sustain these brethren in their new assignments.



Those in favor, please manifest it.
Any opposed, by the same sign.

It is proposed that we sustain the following as the new Sunday School General Presidency, to be effective on August 1, 2024: Paul V. Johnson as President, Chad H Webb as First Counselor, and Gabriel W. Reid as Second Counselor.

Those in favor may manifest it.
Any opposed may so signify.

We note that Brother Reid is currently serving as president of the Australia Sydney Mission and is therefore not in Salt Lake City for the conference.

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

All in favor may do so by the uplifted hand.

Those opposed, if any.

Thank you, brothers and sisters, for your continued faith and prayers

on behalf of the leadership of the Church.

Changes to Area Seventies

The following Area Seventies were sustained during a leadership session held as part of general conference:

Daniel A. Abeo, Mauricio A. Aratújo, Randy T. Austin, Michel D. Avegnon, Philip J. Barton, Bradley S. Bateman, Eber Antônio Beck, Eric D. Bednar, Jared Black, Bryan G. Borela, Jaime A. Bravo, Juan G. Cardenas, Sancho N. Chukwu, Mark J Cluff, Danilo F. Costales, Daniel A. Cruzado, Gregorio Davalos, Julio N. Del Sero, Ryan E. Dobbs, Stephen W. Dyer, Brik V. Eyre, Denny Fa'alogo, Timothy L. Farnes, Martín P. Fernández, Luis A. Ferrizo, Ángel J. Gómez, Georgie E. Guidi, Shinjiro Hara, Daniel L. Harris, Todd D. Haynie, Thomas Hengst, John R. Higgins, Niels O. Jensen, Fritzner A. Joseph, Kyoni Kasongo, John S. K. Kauwe III, Dan Kawashima, J. Joseph Kiehl, Carl F. Krauss, Yew Mun Kwan, Woo Cheol Lee, Wai Hung Mak, David R. Marriott, Ignatius Maziofa, Derek B. Miller, Albert Mutariswa, Marvin I. Palomo, Kyung Yeol Park, Domingo J. Perez, Oscar A. Perez, Raul Perez, Gayle L. Pollock, Pierre Portes, Marco A. Quezada, Stephen T. Rockwood, Guillermo Rojas, Kgomotso T. Sehloho, Sandro Alex Silva, Juswan Tandiman, Asuquo E. Udobong, Dwayne J. Van Heerden,

Shih Ning (Steve) Yang, Juan F. Zorrilla, Leopoldo Zuñiga.

The following Area Seventies will be released on or before August 1, 2024:

Solomon I. Aliche, Guillermo A. Alvarez, Daren R. Barney, Julius F. Barrientos, James H. Bekker, David L. Buckner, Glenn Burgess, Marcos Cabral, Gregorio E. Casillas, Dunstan G. B. T. Chadambuka, Alan C. K. Cheung, Paul N. Clayton, Michael Czesla, Hiroyuki Domon, Mernard P. Donato, I. Raymond Egbo, Zachary F. Evans, Sapele Fa'alogo Jr., Saulo G. Franco, David Frischknecht, John J. Gallego, Efraín R. García, Robert Gordon, Mark A. Gottfredson, D. Martin Goury, Michael J. Hess, Bhanu K. Hiranandani, Richard S. Hutchins, Tito Ibañez, Eustache Ilunga, Akinori Ito, Anthony M. Kaku, Christopher H. Kim, H. Moroni Klein, Stephen Chee Kong Lai, V. Daniel Lattaro, Thabo Lebethoa, Tarmo Lepp, Itzcoatl Lozano, Kevin Lythgoe, Clement M. Matswagothata, Edgar P. Montes, Luiz C. D. Queiroz, Ifano Rasolondraibe, Eduardo D. Resek, Tomás G. Román, Ramon E. Sarmiento, Steven D. Shumway, Luis Spina, Jared W. Stone, Michael B. Strong, Djarot Subiantoro, Carlos G. Süffert, Voi R. Taeoalii, Karim Del Valle, Sergio R. Vargas, Helmut Wondra. ■



Presented by **Jared B. Larson**
Managing Director, Church Auditing Department

Church Auditing Department Report, 2023

*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 and entities, 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 2023 have been recorded and administered in accordance with Church-approved budgets, accounting practices, and policies. 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
 Jared B. Larson
 Managing Director ■





By President Jeffrey R. Holland
Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Motions of a Hidden Fire

God hears every prayer we offer and responds to each of them according to the path He has outlined for our perfection.

Brothers and sisters, I have learned a painful lesson since I last occupied this pulpit in October of 2022. That lesson is: if you don't give an acceptable talk, you can be banned for the next several conferences. You can see I am assigned early in the first session of this one. What you can't see is that I am positioned on a trapdoor with a very delicate latch. If this talk doesn't go well, I won't see you for another few conferences.

In the spirit of that beautiful hymn with this beautiful choir, I *have* learned some lessons recently that, with the Lord's help, I wish to share with you today. That will make this a very personal talk.

The most personal and painful of all these recent experiences has been the passing of my beloved wife, Pat. She *was* the greatest woman I have ever known—a perfect wife and mother, to say nothing of her purity, her gift of expression, her spirituality. She gave a talk once titled “Fulfilling the Measure of Your Creation.” It seems to me that she fulfilled the measure of *her* creation more successfully than anyone could have dreamed possible. She was a complete daughter of God, an exemplary woman of Christ. I was the most fortunate of men to spend 60 years of my life with her. Should I prove

worthy, our sealing means I can spend eternity with her.

Another experience began 48 hours after my wife's burial. At that time, I was rushed to the hospital in an acute medical crisis. I then spent the first four weeks of a six-week stay in and out of intensive care and in and out of consciousness.

Virtually all my experience *in* the hospital during that first period is lost to my memory. What is *not* lost is my memory of a journey *outside* the hospital, out to what seemed the edge of eternity. I cannot speak fully of that experience here, but I can say that part of what I received was an admonition to return to my ministry with more urgency, more consecration, more focus on the Savior, more faith in His word.

I couldn't help but feel I was receiving my own personal version of a revelation given to the Twelve nearly 200 years ago:

“Thou shalt bear record of my name . . . [and] send forth my word unto the ends of the earth. . . .

“ . . . Morning by morning; and day after day let thy warning voice go forth; and when the night cometh let not the inhabitants of the earth slumber, because of thy speech. . . .

“Arise[,] . . . take up your cross, [and] follow me.”¹

My beloved sisters and brothers, since that experience, I have tried to take up my cross more earnestly, with more resolve to find where I can raise an apostolic voice of both warmth and warning in the morning, during the day, and into the night.

That leads me to a *third* truth that came in those months of loss, illness, and distress. It was a renewed witness of and endless gratitude for the resolute prayers of this Church—your prayers—of which I have been the beneficiary. I will be eternally grateful for the supplication of thousands of people who, like the importuning widow,² repeatedly sought heaven's intervention in my behalf. I received priesthood blessings, and I saw my high school class fast for me, as did several random wards across the Church. And my name must have been on the prayer roll of virtually every temple in the Church.

In my profound gratitude for all this, I join G. K. Chesterton, who said once “that thanks are the highest form of thought; and . . . gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder.”³



Argentina



Finland

With my own “happiness doubled by wonder,” I thank all of you and thank my Father in Heaven, who heard your prayers and blessed my life.

Brothers and sisters, I testify that God hears *every* prayer we offer and responds to each of them according to the path He has outlined for our perfection. I recognize that at roughly the same time so many were praying for the restoration of my health, an equal number—including me—were praying for the restoration of my wife’s health. I testify that both of those prayers were heard *and* answered by a divinely compassionate Heavenly Father, even if the prayers for Pat were *not* answered the way I asked. It is for reasons known only to God why prayers are answered differently than we hope—but I promise you they *are* heard and they *are* answered according to His unfailing love and cosmic timetable.

If we “ask not amiss,”⁴ there are no limits to when, where, or about what we should pray. According to the revelations, we are to “pray always.”⁵ We are to pray, Amulek said, for “those

who are around you,”⁶ with the belief that the “fervent prayer of a righteous [people] availeth much.”⁷ Our prayers ought to be vocal when we have the privacy to so offer them.⁸ If that is not practical, they should be carried as silent utterances in our heart.⁹ We sing that prayers are “motion[s] of a hidden fire,”¹⁰ always to be offered, according to the Savior Himself, to God the Eternal Father in the name of His Only Begotten Son.¹¹

My beloved friends, our prayers are our sweetest hour,¹² our most “sincere desire,”¹³ our simplest, purest form of worship.¹⁴ We should pray individually, in our families, and in congregations of all sizes.¹⁵ We are to employ prayer as a shield against temptation,¹⁶ and if there be any time we feel *not* to pray, we can be sure that hesitancy does *not* come from God, who yearns to communicate with His children at any and all times. Indeed, some efforts to keep us from praying come directly from the adversary.¹⁷ When we don’t know how or exactly for what to pray, we should begin, and continue, until the Holy Spirit guides

us into the prayer we should be offering.¹⁸ This approach may be the one we have to invoke when praying for our enemies and those who despitefully use us.¹⁹

Ultimately, we can look to the example of the Savior, who prayed so very, very often. But it has always been intriguing to me that Jesus felt the need to pray at all. Wasn’t He perfect? About what did He need to pray? Well, I have come to realize that He too, with us, wanted to “seek [the Father’s] face, believe his word, and trust his grace.”²⁰ Time after time, He retreated from society to be alone before piercing heaven with His prayers.²¹ At other times, He prayed in the company of a few companions. Then He would seek heaven on behalf of multitudes who would cover a hillside. Sometimes prayer glorified His clothing.²² Sometimes it glorified His countenance.²³ Sometimes He stood to pray, sometimes He knelt, and at least once He fell on His face in prayer.²⁴

Luke describes Jesus’s descent into His expiation as requiring Him to

pray “more earnestly.”²⁵ How does one who was perfect pray more earnestly? We assume that all of His prayers were earnest, yet in fulfilling His atoning sacrifice and through the pain that attended its universal reach, He felt to pray ever more pleadingly, with the weight of His offering finally bringing blood from every pore.

Against that backdrop of Christ’s victory over death and His recent gift to me of a few more weeks or months in mortality, I bear solemn witness of the reality of eternal life and the need for us to be serious in our planning for it.

I bear witness that when Christ comes, He needs to recognize us—not as nominal members listed on a faded baptismal record but as thoroughly

committed, faithfully believing, covenant-keeping disciples. This is an urgent matter for all of us, lest we ever hear with devastating regret: “I never knew you,”²⁶ or, as Joseph Smith translated that phrase, “[You] never knew me.”²⁷

Fortunately, we have help for this task—lots of help. We need to believe in angels and miracles and the promises of the holy priesthood. We need to believe in the gift of the Holy Ghost, the influence of good families and friends, and the power of the pure love of Christ. We need to believe in revelation and prophets, seers, and revelators and President Russell M. Nelson. We need to believe that with prayer and pleading and personal righteousness, we really can

ascend to “Mount Zion, . . . the city of the living God, the heavenly place, the holiest of all.”²⁸

Brothers and sisters, as we repent of our sins and come boldly to the “throne of grace,”²⁹ leaving before Him there our alms and our heartfelt supplications, we will find mercy and compassion and forgiveness at the benevolent hands of our Eternal Father and His obedient, perfectly pure Son. Then, with Job and all the refined faithful, we will behold a world “too wonderful”³⁰ to understand. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Doctrine and Covenants 112:4–5, 14.
2. See Luke 18:1–8.
3. G. K. Chesterton, *A Short History of England* (1917), 72.
4. 2 Nephi 4:35.
5. Luke 21:36; see also Alma 13:28; 34:27; Doctrine and Covenants 23:6.
6. Alma 34:27; see also 2 Thessalonians 1:11; Alma 34:21.
7. James 5:16.
8. See Psalm 55:17.
9. See Mosiah 24:10–12; Alma 34:27; 3 Nephi 20:1; Doctrine and Covenants 19:28.
10. “Prayer Is the Soul’s Sincere Desire,” *Hymns*, no. 145.
11. See 3 Nephi 18:19–21.
12. See “Sweet Hour of Prayer,” *Hymns*, no. 142.
13. *Hymns*, no. 145.
14. See Alma 33:3.
15. See Matthew 14:23; 18:19–20; 3 Nephi 18:16, 21–24, 30; Helaman 3:35.
16. See Matthew 6:13; Luke 22:40; 3 Nephi 18:15; Doctrine and Covenants 10:5.
17. See 2 Nephi 32:8; Joseph Smith—History 1:15–16.
18. See Romans 8:26; 3 Nephi 19:24; Doctrine and Covenants 50:30.
19. See Matthew 5:44.
20. *Hymns*, no. 142.
21. See Matthew 14:23.
22. See Matthew 17:2; Mark 9:3; Luke 9:29; 3 Nephi 19:25.
23. See Matthew 17:2; Luke 9:29; 3 Nephi 19:25.
24. See Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:35.
25. Luke 22:44.
26. Matthew 7:23.
27. Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 7:33 (in Matthew 7:23, footnote *a*).
28. Doctrine and Covenants 76:66.
29. Hebrews 4:16.
30. Job 42:3.



United States



By Sister J. Anette Dennis
First Counselor in the Relief Society General Presidency

Put Ye On the Lord Jesus Christ

Through honoring our covenants, we enable God to pour out the multitude of promised blessings associated with those covenants.

As my two youngest children were growing, I discovered books that were entertaining and engaging but also used symbolism in their stories. As we read together in the evenings, I loved helping my children understand the symbolism the author was using to teach deeper principles, even gospel principles.

I knew this was sinking in one day when my younger son was in his early teens. He had started a new book and just wanted to enjoy the story, but his mind kept trying to find the deeper meaning in everything he was reading. He was frustrated, but I was smiling inside.

Jesus taught through stories and symbols¹—a mustard seed to teach the power of faith,² a lost sheep to teach the worth of souls,³ a prodigal son to teach the character of God.⁴ His parables were symbols through which He could teach deeper lessons to those who had “ears to hear.”⁵ But those not seeking the deeper meaning would not understand,⁶ just as many who read those same books I read to my children never knew there were deeper meanings and so much more to get out of those stories.

When God the Father offered His Only Begotten Son as a sacrifice for us, Jesus Christ Himself became the highest symbol of our Father in Heaven’s undying love for each of us.⁷ Jesus Christ became the Lamb of God.⁸

We have the privilege and blessing of being invited into a covenant relationship with God, in which our own lives can become a symbol of that covenant. Covenants create the kind of relationship that allows God to mold and change us over time and lift us to become more like the Savior, drawing us closer and closer to Him and our Father⁹ and eventually preparing us to enter Their presence.

Each person on earth is a beloved son or daughter of God.¹⁰ When we choose to be part of a covenant, it enhances and deepens our relationship with Him. President Russell M. Nelson has taught that when we choose to make covenants with God, our relationship with Him can become much closer than it was before our covenant, and it enables Him to bless us with an extra measure of His mercy and love, a covenantal love referred to as *hesed* in the Hebrew language.¹¹ The covenant path is all

about our relationship with God—our *hesed* relationship with Him.¹²

Our Father wants a deeper relationship with all His sons and daughters,¹³ but it is our choice. As we choose to draw nearer to Him through a *covenant* relationship, it allows Him to draw nearer to us¹⁴ and more fully bless us.

God sets the conditions and obligations of the covenants we make.¹⁵ When we choose to enter into that relationship, we witness to Him, through the symbolic actions of each covenant, that we are willing to abide by the conditions He has set.¹⁶ Through honoring our covenants, we enable God to pour out the multitude of promised blessings associated with those covenants,¹⁷ including increased power to change and become more like our Savior. Jesus Christ is at the center of all covenants we make, and covenant blessings are made possible because of His atoning sacrifice.¹⁸

Baptism by immersion is the symbolic gate through which we enter into a covenant relationship with God. Being immersed in the water and coming up again is symbolic of



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the Savior's death and Resurrection to new life.¹⁹ As we are baptized, we symbolically die and are born again into the family of Christ and show we are willing to take His name upon us.²⁰ We ourselves embody that covenant symbolism. In the New Testament we read, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."²¹ With our baptism we symbolically put on Christ.

The ordinance of the sacrament also points to the Savior. The bread and water are symbolic of Christ's flesh and blood shed for us.²² The gift of His Atonement is symbolically offered to us each week when a priesthood holder, representing the Savior Himself, offers us the bread and water. As we perform the action of eating and drinking the emblems of His flesh and blood, Christ symbolically becomes a part of us.²³ We again put on Christ as we make a new covenant each week.²⁴

As we make covenants with God in the house of the Lord, we further deepen our relationship with Him.²⁵ Everything we do in the temple points to our Father's plan for us, at the heart of which is the Savior and His atoning sacrifice.²⁶ The Lord will teach us line upon line²⁷ through the symbolism of the ordinances and covenants as we open our hearts and prayerfully seek to understand the deeper meanings.

As part of the temple endowment, we are *authorized* to wear the garment of the holy priesthood. It is both a sacred obligation and a sacred privilege.

In many religious traditions, special outer clothing is worn as a symbol of a person's beliefs and commitment to God,²⁸ and ceremonial clothing is often worn by those leading worship services. Those sacred vestments carry deep meaning for those who wear them. We read in scripture that

in ancient times, sacred ceremonial clothing was also worn in conjunction with temple rituals.²⁹

As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, those of us who have chosen to make covenants with God in the house of the Lord wear sacred ceremonial outer clothing during temple worship, symbolic of the clothing worn in ancient temple rituals. We also wear the garment of the holy priesthood, both during temple worship *and* in our everyday lives.³⁰

The garment of the holy priesthood is deeply symbolic and *also* points to the Savior. When Adam and Eve partook of the fruit and had to leave the Garden of Eden, they were given coats of skins as a covering for them.³¹ It is likely that an animal was sacrificed to make those coats of skins—symbolic of the Savior's own sacrifice for us. *Kaphar* is the basic Hebrew word for atonement, and one of its meanings is "to cover."³² Our temple garment reminds us that the Savior and the blessings of His Atonement cover us throughout our lives. As we put on the garment of the holy priesthood each day, that beautiful symbol becomes a part of us.

In the New Testament book of Romans, we read: "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. . . . Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ."³³

I am so grateful for the privilege of wearing the garment of the holy priesthood to remind me that the Savior and the blessings of His infinite Atonement constantly cover me throughout my mortal journey. It also reminds me that as I keep the covenants I have made with God in the house of the Lord, I have symbolically put on Christ, who Himself

is an armor of light. He will protect me from evil,³⁴ give me power and increased capacity,³⁵ and be my light and guide³⁶ through the darkness and difficulties of this world.

There is deep and beautiful symbolic meaning in the garment of the holy priesthood and its relationship to Christ. I believe that my willingness³⁷ to wear the holy garment becomes *my* symbol to Him.³⁸ It is my own personal sign to God, not a sign to others.³⁹

I am so grateful for my Savior, Jesus Christ.⁴⁰ His atoning sacrifice

for us became the greatest symbol of His and our Father in Heaven's infinite love for each of us,⁴¹ with the tangible symbols of that love and sacrifice—the marks in the Savior's hands, feet, and side—remaining even after His Resurrection.⁴²

As I keep my covenants and obligations with God, including wearing the garment of the holy priesthood, my very life can become a personal symbol of my love and deep gratitude for my Savior, Jesus Christ, and my desire to have Him with me always.

If you have not yet done so, I invite you to choose a deeper relationship with God by making covenants with Him in the house of the Lord. Study the talks of our prophet (including the beautiful teachings in the footnotes of his talks, which most conference talks have). He has spoken repeatedly about covenants for years and especially since becoming President of the Church. Learn from his teachings about the beautiful blessings and increased power and capacity that can be yours through making and keeping covenants with God.⁴³



The *General Handbook* states that it is not required to have a mission call or be engaged to be married to make temple covenants.⁴⁴ A person must be at least 18 years old, no longer be attending high school or the equivalent, and be a member of the Church for at least one year. There are also standards of personal holiness required.⁴⁵ If you have the desire to deepen your relationship with your Father in Heaven and Jesus Christ by making sacred covenants in the house of the Lord, I invite you to speak with your bishop or branch president and let him know of your desires. He will help you know how to prepare to receive and honor those covenants.

Through a covenant relationship with God, our own lives can become a living symbol of our commitment to and deep love for our Father in Heaven, our *hesed* for Him,⁴⁶ and our desire to progress and eventually become like our Savior, being prepared to one day enter Their presence. I testify that the great blessings of that covenant relationship are well worth the price. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See Mark 4:33–34.
2. See Matthew 17:20.
3. See Luke 15:3–7.
4. See Luke 15:11–32.
5. Matthew 13:9.
6. See Matthew 13:10–13.
7. See John 3:16–17.
8. See John 1:29; 1 Nephi 11:20–22; see also Russell M. Nelson, “The Atonement,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 34–35.
9. “By entering into a covenant with us, God not only binds us to Him, but it is as if He straps us on His back and takes us where only He can go” (Kerry Muhlestein, *God Will Prevail: Ancient Covenants, Modern Blessings, and the Gathering of Israel* [2021], 8). See Doctrine and Covenants 133:53.
10. “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” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Gospel Library).

11. “*Hesed* is a . . . term describing a covenant relationship in which both parties are bound to be loyal and faithful to each other. . . . Because God has *hesed* for those who have covenanted with Him, . . . He will continue to work with them and offer them opportunities to change. . . . And should they stray, He will help them find their way back to Him,” just as He did time and time again with His covenant people in Old Testament times. “When we enter a covenant with God, we have made a covenant with Him who will always keep His word. He will do everything He can, without infringing on our agency, to help us keep ours” (Russell M. Nelson, “The Everlasting Covenant,” *Liahona*, Oct. 2022, 6, 11; see also Muhlestein, *God Will Prevail*, 9–12; Deuteronomy 7:9).
12. God will never abandon His covenant relationships. “He will never tire in His efforts to help us, and we will never exhaust His merciful patience with us” (Russell M. Nelson, “The Everlasting Covenant,” 6). We are joyfully bound together through an everlasting covenant.
13. See Jeremiah 31:33; 1 Nephi 17:40; Russell M. Nelson, “Let God Prevail,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2020, 92.
14. See James 4:8; Doctrine and Covenants 88:63.
15. See Russell M. Nelson, “Covenants,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2011, 86.
16. See Mosiah 5:5; 18:8–10.
17. See Russell M. Nelson, “Spiritual Treasures,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2019, 77; Russell M. Nelson, “The Temple and Your Spiritual Foundation,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2021, 94; Russell M. Nelson, “Overcome the World and Find Rest,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2022, 96; Camille N. Johnson, “Jesus Christ Is Relief,” *Liahona*, May 2023, 82; Dale G. Renlund, “Accessing God’s Power through Covenants,” *Liahona*, May 2023, 35–37; Jean B. Bingham, “Covenants with God Strengthen, Protect, and Prepare Us for Eternal Glory,” *Liahona*, May 2022, 66.
18. See Russell M. Nelson, “The Everlasting Covenant,” 7.
19. See Romans 6:3–4; Colossians 2:12.
20. See 2 Nephi 31:13; Moroni 6:3; Doctrine and Covenants 20:77.
21. Galatians 3:27.
22. See Luke 22:19–20.
23. See John 6:56.
24. President Russell M. Nelson said: “Often, I hear the expression that we partake of the sacrament to renew covenants made at baptism. While that’s true, it’s much more than that. I’ve made a new covenant. You

have made new covenants” (in Dale G. Renlund, “Unwavering Commitment to Jesus Christ,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2019, 25, footnote 18).

25. See Russell M. Nelson, “The Everlasting Covenant,” 10.
26. See Russell M. Nelson, “The Temple and Your Spiritual Foundation,” 93–94.
27. See 2 Nephi 28:30.
28. See “Sacred Temple Clothing,” ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
29. See Exodus 28; 40:12–13.
30. See “Sacred Temple Clothing,” ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
31. See Genesis 3:21.
32. See Russell M. Nelson, “The Atonement,” 34.
33. Romans 13:12, 14.
34. See Ephesians 6:10–18.
35. See Exodus 24:13–15; David A. Bednar, “Bear Up Their Burdens with Ease,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2014, 88–89.
36. See Psalm 119:105; 1 Nephi 17:13.
37. Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught, “The submission of one’s will is really the only uniquely personal thing we have to place on God’s altar” (“Swallowed Up in the Will of the Father,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 24).
38. Not because of personal preference, inconvenience, or style, but because of certain medical conditions, for some people, wearing the garment is much more difficult. The Lord knows our hearts and understands our desires to honor our commitments with Him. See, for example, Mosiah 4:24–25.
39. We should not seek to judge others’ use of the temple garment. See Alma 41:14; see also Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “The Merciful Obtain Mercy,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2012, 70, 75.
40. See Jeffrey R. Holland, “None Were with Him,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2009, 86–88.
41. See John 3:16–17; 15:12–13; Doctrine and Covenants 34:3.
42. See Isaiah 49:14–16.
43. See Russell M. Nelson, “The Everlasting Covenant,” 4–11; Russell M. Nelson, “Spiritual Treasures,” 76–79; Russell M. Nelson, “Let God Prevail,” 92–95; Russell M. Nelson, “The Temple and Your Spiritual Foundation,” 93–96; Russell M. Nelson, “Overcome the World and Find Rest,” 95–98; Russell M. Nelson, “A Plea to My Sisters,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2015, 95–97.
44. See *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 26.5.1, 27.2.2, Gospel Library.
45. See Russell M. Nelson, “Closing Remarks,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2019, 121.
46. See Russell M. Nelson, “The Everlasting Covenant,” 11.



By Elder Alexander Dushku
Of the Seventy

Pillars and Rays

We too can have our own pillar of light—one ray at a time.

My message is for those who worry about their testimony because they haven't had overwhelming spiritual experiences. I pray that I can provide some peace and assurance.

The Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ began with an explosion of light and truth! A teenage boy in upstate New York, with the very ordinary name of Joseph Smith, enters a grove of trees to pray. He's worried about his soul and his standing before God. He seeks forgiveness for his sins. And he's confused about which church to join. He needs clarity and peace—he needs light and knowledge.¹

As Joseph kneels to pray and “offer up the desires of [his] heart to God,” a thick darkness envelops him. Something evil, oppressive, and very real tries to stop him—to bind his tongue so he cannot speak. The forces of darkness get so intense that Joseph thinks he's going to die. But he “exert[s] all [his] powers to call upon God to deliver [him] out of the power of this enemy which [has] seized upon [him].” And then, “at the very moment when [he's] ready to sink into despair and abandon [him]self to destruction,” when he doesn't know if he can hang on any longer, a glorious brilliance fills the grove, scattering the darkness and the enemy of his soul.²

A “pillar of light” brighter than the sun gradually descends upon him.

One personage appears, and then another.³ Their “brightness and glory defy all description.” The first, our Heavenly Father, speaks his name, “pointing to the other—[Joseph!] *This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*”⁴

And with that overwhelming burst of light and truth, the Restoration has begun. A veritable flood of divine revelation and blessings will follow: new scripture, restored priesthood keys, apostles and prophets, ordinances and covenants, and the re-establishment of the Lord's true and living Church, which will someday fill the earth with the light and witness of Jesus Christ and His restored gospel.

All that, and much more, began with a boy's desperate prayer and a pillar of light.

We too have our own desperate needs. We too need freedom from spiritual confusion and worldly darkness. We too need to know for ourselves.⁵ That is one reason President Russell M. Nelson has invited us to “immerse [ourselves] in the glorious light of the Restoration.”⁶

One of the great truths of the Restoration is that the heavens are open—that we too can receive light and knowledge from on high. I testify that is true.

But we must be wary of a spiritual trap. Sometimes faithful Church members become discouraged and even drift away because they

haven't had overwhelming spiritual experiences—because they haven't experienced their own pillar of light. President Spencer W. Kimball warned, “Always expecting the spectacular, many will miss entirely the constant flow of revealed communication.”⁷

President Joseph F. Smith likewise recalled, “The Lord withheld marvels from me [when I was young], and showed me the truth, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little.”⁸

That is the Lord's typical pattern, brothers and sisters. Rather than sending us a pillar of light, the Lord sends us a ray of light, and then another, and another.

Those rays of light are continuously being poured down upon us. The scriptures teach that Jesus Christ “is the light and . . . life of the world,”⁹ that His “Spirit giveth light to every man [and woman] that cometh into the world,”¹⁰ and that His light “fill[s] the immensity of space,” giving “life to all things.”¹¹ The Light of Christ is literally all around us.

If we have received the gift of the Holy Ghost and are striving to exercise faith, repent, and honor our covenants, then we are worthy to receive these divine rays constantly. In Elder David A. Bednar's memorable phrase, “we are ‘living in revelation.’”¹²

And yet, every one of us is different. No two people experience God's light and truth in exactly the same way. Take some time to think about how you experience the light and Spirit of the Lord.

You may have experienced these bursts of light and testimony as “peace [spoken] to your mind concerning [a] matter” that has worried you.¹³

Or as an impression—a still, small voice—that settled “in your mind and in your heart”¹⁴ and urged you

to do something good, such as helping someone.

Perhaps you've been in a class at church—or at a youth camp—and felt a strong desire to follow Jesus Christ and stay faithful.¹⁵ Maybe you even stood and shared a testimony that you hoped was true and then felt it was.

Or maybe you've been praying and felt a joyful assurance that God loves you.¹⁶

You may have heard someone bear testimony of Jesus Christ, and it touched your heart and filled you with hope.¹⁷

Perhaps you were reading in the Book of Mormon and a verse spoke to your soul, as if God had put it there just for you—and then you realized that He did.¹⁸

You may have felt the love of God for others as you served them.¹⁹

Or maybe you struggle to feel the Spirit in the moment because of depression or anxiety but have the precious gift and the faith to look back and recognize past “tender mercies of the Lord.”²⁰

My point is that there are many ways to receive heavenly rays of testimony. These are just a few, of course. They may not be dramatic, but all of them form part of our testimonies.

Brothers and sisters, I have not seen a pillar of light, but, like you, I have experienced many divine rays. Over the years, I've tried to treasure such experiences. I find that as I do, I recognize and remember even more of them. Here are some examples

from my own life. They may not be very impressive to some, but they are precious to me.

I remember being a rowdy teenager at a baptism. As the meeting was about to begin, I felt the Spirit urge me to sit down and be reverent. I sat down and stayed quiet the rest of the meeting.

Before my mission, I was afraid my testimony wasn't strong enough. No one in my family had ever served a mission, and I didn't know if I could do it. I remember studying and praying desperately to receive a more certain witness of Jesus Christ. Then one day, as I pled with Heavenly Father, I felt a powerful sense of light and warmth. And I knew. I just knew.

I remember being awakened one night years later by a feeling of “pure intelligence” telling me I would be called to serve in the elders quorum.²¹ Two weeks later I was called.

I remember a general conference where a beloved member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles spoke the exact words of testimony I had told a friend I hoped to hear.

I remember kneeling with hundreds of brethren to pray for a dear friend who lay unconscious on a ventilator in a small, faraway hospital after his heart had stopped. As we united our own hearts to plead for his life, he woke up and pulled the ventilator out of his own throat. He serves today as a stake president.

And I remember waking up with strong spiritual feelings after a vivid dream of a dear friend and mentor who passed away far too early, leaving an enormous hole in my life. He was smiling and joyful. I knew he was OK.

These are some of my rays. You have had your own experiences—your own light-filled bursts of testimony. As we recognize, remember, and gather



Taiwan



these rays “together in one,”²² something wonderful and powerful begins to happen. “Light cleaveth unto light”—“truth embraceth truth.”²³ The reality and power of one ray of testimony reinforces and combines with another, and then another, and another. Line upon line, precept upon precept, here a ray and there a ray—one small, treasured spiritual moment at a time—there grows up within us a core of light-filled, spiritual experiences. Perhaps no one ray is strong enough or bright enough to constitute a full testimony, but together they can become a light that the darkness of doubt cannot overcome.

“O then, is not this real?” Alma asks. “I say unto you, Yea, because it is light.”²⁴

“That which is of God is light,” the Lord teaches us, “and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day.”²⁵

That means, brothers and sisters, that in time and through “great diligence,”²⁶ we too can have our own pillar of light—one ray at a time. And

in the midst of that pillar, we too will find a loving Heavenly Father calling us by name, pointing us to our Savior, Jesus Christ, and inviting us to “Hear Him!”

I bear witness of Jesus Christ, that He is the light and life of the whole world—and of your personal world and mine.

I testify that He is the true and living Son of the true and living God and that He stands at the head of this true and living Church, guided and directed by His true and living prophets and apostles.

May we recognize and receive His glorious light and then choose Him over the darkness of the world—always and forever. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See Joseph Smith—History 1:10–13.
2. See Joseph Smith—History 1:14–16.
3. See Joseph Smith, Journal, Nov. 9–11, 1835, 24, josephsmithpapers.org.
4. Joseph Smith—History 1:17.
5. See Joseph Smith—History 1:20. When Joseph Smith returned home after the First Vision, his mother asked if he was OK. He replied, “I am well enough off. . . . *I have learned for myself* that Presbyterianism is not true” (emphasis added).

6. Russell M. Nelson, “Closing Remarks,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2019, 122.
7. Spencer W. Kimball, in Conference Report, Munich Germany Area Conference, 1973, 77; quoted in Graham W. Doxey, “The Voice Is Still Small,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 25.
8. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (1998), 201: “When I as a boy first started out in the ministry, I would frequently go out and ask the Lord to show me some marvelous thing, in order that I might receive a testimony. But the Lord withheld marvels from me, and showed me the truth, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little, until he made me to know the truth from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet, and until doubt and fear had been absolutely purged from me. He did not have to send an angel from the heavens to do this, nor did he have to speak with the trump of an archangel. By the whisperings of the still small voice of the Spirit of the living God, he gave to me the testimony I possess. And by this principle and power he will give to all the children of men a knowledge of the truth that will stay with them, and it will make them to know the truth, as God knows it, and to do the will of the Father as Christ does it.”
9. Mosiah 16:9.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 84:46; see also John 1:9.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 88:12–13.
12. David A. Bednar, *The Spirit of Revelation* (2021), 7.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 6:23.
14. Doctrine and Covenants 8:2; see also Helaman 5:30.



By Elder Ulisses Soares

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

15. See Mosiah 5:2; Doctrine and Covenants 11:12.
16. See 2 Nephi 4:21; Helaman 5:44.
17. The Lord has identified the ability to believe on the testimony of others as a spiritual gift (see Doctrine and Covenants 46:13–14).
18. Modern revelation teaches that the words of scripture “are given by my Spirit unto you, . . . and save it were by my power you could not have them; wherefore, you can testify that you have heard my voice, and know my words” (Doctrine and Covenants 18:35–36).
19. See Mosiah 2:17; Moroni 7:45–48.
20. 1 Nephi 1:20. Elder Gerrit W. Gong has spoken of “look[ing] with eyes to see and rejoic[ing] in the Lord’s many tender mercies in our lives” (“Ministering,” *Liahona*, May 2023, 18) and of how “the Lord’s hand in our lives is often clearest in hindsight” (“Always Remember Him,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2016, 108). The gift of gratefully recognizing and acknowledging the hand of the Lord in our lives, even if we didn’t recognize it or feel it in the moment, is powerful. The scriptures speak often of the spiritual power of remembering (see Helaman 5:9–12; Doctrine and Covenants 20:77, 79), which can be a precursor to revelation (see Moroni 10:3–4).
21. Joseph Smith taught, “A person may profit by noticing the first intimation of the spirit of revelation; for instance, when you feel pure intelligence flowing into you, it may give you sudden strokes of ideas, so that by noticing it, you may find it fulfilled the same day or soon; (i.e.) those things that were presented unto your minds by the Spirit of God, will come to pass; and thus by learning the Spirit of God and understanding it, you may grow into the principle of revelation, until you become perfect in Christ Jesus” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 132).
22. Ephesians 1:10.
23. Doctrine and Covenants 88:40: “For intelligence cleaveth unto intelligence; wisdom receiveth wisdom; truth embraceth truth; virtue loveth virtue; light cleaveth unto light.”
24. Alma 32:35. Alma emphasized that these light-filled experiences, although often small, are real in every sense. Their reality becomes even more powerful when they are combined together to form a powerful whole.
25. Doctrine and Covenants 50:24.
26. Alma 32:41.

Covenant Confidence through Jesus Christ

When we enter the Lord’s house, we embark on a sacred journey of learning to become higher and holier disciples of Christ.

My beloved brothers and sisters, I pray that we may be spiritually renewed by the inspired messages from our leaders this weekend and rejoice in what I love to call “covenant confidence through Jesus Christ.” This confidence is the quiet yet certain assurance of receiving the blessings that God promises for those who keep their covenants and is so needed amid the challenging circumstances of our day.

The construction of new houses of the Lord across the world, under the inspired leadership of President Russell M. Nelson, has caused great rejoicing among Church members and serves as an important symbol of the expansion of the Lord’s kingdom.

Reflecting on my awe-inspiring experience at the dedication of the Feather River California Temple last October, I wondered if sometimes we get lost in the excitement of having new temples in our cities and communities and neglect the holier purpose of the sacred covenants made in the temple.

Inscribed on the front of each temple is a solemn statement: “Holiness to the Lord.”¹ These inspired words are a clear invitation that when we enter the Lord’s house,

we embark on a sacred journey of learning to become higher and holier disciples of Christ. As we make covenants in holiness before God and commit to follow the Savior, we receive the power to change our hearts, renew our spirits, and deepen our relationship with Him. Such an endeavor brings sanctification to our souls and forms a sacred bond with God and Jesus Christ, who promise that we can inherit the gift of eternal life.² The result of this sacred journey is that we obtain a holier and higher confidence for our day-to-day lives within our covenants made through Jesus Christ.

Such confidence is the pinnacle of our divine connection with God and can help us increase our devotion to and gratitude for Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice. It fortifies our ability to love and serve others, and it strengthens our souls to live in an unholy world that is increasingly dark and discouraging. It empowers us to overcome the seeds of doubt and despair, fear and frustration, heartache and hopelessness that the enemy tries to drive deep into our hearts, especially when life is hard, trials are long, or circumstances are



Argentina

difficult. A biblical verse offers sound advice for each of us as we lean into the stiff wind of today’s worldly challenges: “Cast not away therefore your confidence.”³

Dear brothers and sisters, those who gain genuine confidence in the covenants made in the house of the Lord through Jesus Christ possess one of the most powerful forces that we can access in this life.

As we have studied the Book of Mormon in *Come, Follow Me* this year, we have witnessed how Nephi beautifully exemplified the power of this type of covenant confidence through his faithfulness when he faced setbacks and challenges, like getting the plates as commanded by the Lord. Nephi, despite being exceedingly sorrowful for the fear and lack of faith of Laman and Lemuel, remained confident that the Lord would deliver the plates to them. He said unto his brothers, “As the Lord liveth, and as we live, we will not go down unto our father in the wilderness until we have accomplished the thing which the Lord hath commanded us.”⁴ Because of Nephi’s confidence in the Lord’s promises, he was able to accomplish what he had been commanded to do.⁵ Later, in his vision, Nephi beheld the influence of this type of confidence,

writing, “I, Nephi, beheld the power of the Lamb of God, that it descended upon the saints of the church of the Lamb, and upon the covenant people of the Lord, . . . and they were armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory.”⁶

I have seen firsthand the Lord’s loving promises and power flowing into the lives of God’s children, strengthening them to face life’s circumstances. The other day my wife came home after her worship in the temple and told me how deeply touched she was by what she experienced there. As she entered the house of the Lord, she saw a man in a wheelchair moving very slowly and a woman walking with great difficulty using a cane, both courageously coming to worship the Lord in His house. As my wife walked into the initiatory area, she saw a sweet sister who was missing one arm—and had only part of another arm—beautifully and celestially performing any tasks she was given.

As my wife and I talked about that experience, we concluded that only pure and heartfelt confidence in the eternal promises God provides through the holy covenants made with Him in His house could cause those marvelous disciples of Christ

to leave their homes on that very freezing day, despite their personal life circumstances.

My dear friends, if there is one thing we could possess—and one thing we could pass on to our children and grandchildren that would help each in the tests and trials ahead—it would be confidence in the covenants made through Jesus Christ. Obtaining such a divine possession will help them live as the Lord promised His faithful followers: “My disciples shall stand in holy places, and shall not be moved.”⁷

How do we gain such confidence through Jesus Christ? It comes through humility, centering our lives on the Savior, living by the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ, receiving the ordinances of salvation and exaltation, and honoring the covenants we make with God in His holy house.

In his closing remarks at the October 2019 general conference, our dear prophet reminded us about an important step in achieving covenant confidence, saying: “Individual worthiness to enter the Lord’s house requires much individual spiritual preparation. . . . Individual worthiness requires a total conversion of mind and heart to be more like the Lord, to be an honest citizen, to be a better example, and to be a holier person.”⁸ Therefore, if we change our preparation to enter the temple, we will change our experience in the temple, which will transform our lives outside of the temple. “Then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven.”⁹

A bishop I know refers to the oldest class in Primary not as a “Primary” class but as a “temple preparation” class. In January the bishop has the

class members and their teachers come to his office, where they talk about how they will spend the entire year preparing to enter the temple. The bishop takes time to go through the applicable temple recommend interview questions, which are then included in their Primary lessons. He invites the children to be prepared so that when they come to the bishop's office in one year, they will be confident, covenant confident, ready to receive a temple recommend and enter the Lord's house. This year the bishop had four young girls who were so excited, prepared, and confident to go to the temple that they wanted the bishop to print their recommends

on New Year's Day at 12:01 a.m.

Preparation isn't just for those going to the temple for the first time. We all should be perpetually preparing to go to the house of the Lord. One stake I know has adopted the motto "Home centered, Church supported, and temple bound."

*Bound*¹⁰ is an interesting word in that it means focused on a direction, but it also means fastened to or secured by, resolved and determined, sure. So being temple bound secures us to the Savior, giving us proper direction and stability while ensuring we have covenant confidence through Jesus Christ. Therefore, all of us should intentionally enhance such binding

by having our next appointment scheduled with the Lord in His holy house, whether the temple is near or far away.¹¹

Our dear prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, reminds us about these vital principles by saying: "The temple lies at the center of strengthening our faith and spiritual fortitude because the Savior and His doctrine are the very heart of the temple. Everything taught in the temple, through instruction and through the Spirit, increases our understanding of Jesus Christ. His essential ordinances bind us to Him through sacred priesthood covenants. Then, as we keep our covenants, He endows us with *His* healing, strengthening power. And oh, how we will need His power in the days ahead."¹²

The Savior desires that we become prepared to understand, with great clarity, exactly how to act as we make covenants with our Heavenly Father in His name. He wants us to be prepared to experience our privileges, promises, and responsibilities; to be prepared to have the spiritual insights and awakenings that we need in this life. I know that when the Lord sees even a spark of desire or a flicker of righteous effort in our willingness to center our lives on Him and on the ordinances and covenants we make in His house, He will bless us, in His perfect way, with the miracles and tender mercies we need.

The house of the Lord is where we can be transformed in higher and holier ways. So, when we walk out of the temple, transformed by our hope in the promises of the covenants, armed with power from on high, we take the temple with us into our homes and lives. I assure you that having the spirit of the Lord's house in us changes us, completely.



Finland





By Elder Jack N. Gerard
Of the Seventy

We also know from the temple that if we want the Spirit of the Lord to be unrestrained in our lives, we simply cannot and must not have unkind feelings toward anyone. Giving place in our hearts or minds for unkind feelings or thoughts will produce unkind words and actions, whether on social media or in our homes, causing the Spirit of the Lord to withdraw from our hearts. Therefore, please cast not away your confidence, but rather, let your confidence wax strong.

The ongoing and accelerating building of temples will continue to excite, inspire, and bless us. Yet more important, as we change our preparation to enter the temple, we will change our experience in the temple, which will transform our lives outside of the temple. May this transformation fill us with confidence in our holy covenants made with God through Jesus Christ. God lives, Jesus is our Savior, and this is His restored Church on earth. I reverently declare these truths in the sacred name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See Exodus 28:36; 39:30; Psalm 93:5. Translated equivalents are used on temples in non-English-speaking localities.
2. See Doctrine and Covenants 14:7; 132:19–20, 24.
3. Hebrews 10:35.
4. 1 Nephi 3:15.
5. See 1 Nephi 4:6–38.
6. 1 Nephi 14:14.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 45:32.
8. Russell M. Nelson, “Closing Remarks,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2019, 121–22.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 121:45.
10. See *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, “bound.”
11. See Russell M. Nelson, “Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 114.
12. Russell M. Nelson, “The Temple and Your Spiritual Foundation,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2021, 93–94.

Integrity: A Christlike Attribute

Living a life of integrity requires us to be true to God, to each other, and to our divine identity.

In the closing hours of the Savior’s ministry, He went to the Mount of Olives into a garden called Gethsemane and invited His disciples to wait.¹ Now alone, He petitioned His Father, “If thou be willing, remove this cup from me.”² Being in agony, His suffering caused Him, “even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, . . . and would that [He] might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink.”³ Yet in the moment of deep despair, the Savior did not shrink “but partook and finished [His] preparations unto the children of men.”⁴

As the Only Begotten of the Father, Jesus Christ had power over death, pain, and suffering but did not shrink. He fulfilled the covenant He had made with His Father and, in doing so, manifested a Christlike attribute increasingly important in the world in which we live—the attribute of integrity. He remained true to God, to each of us, and to His divine identity.

Integrity

Jesus Christ is our Exemplar. Living a life of integrity requires us to be true to God, to each other, and to our divine identity. Integrity flows from the first great commandment to love God. Because you love God,

you are true to Him at all times. You understand that there is right and wrong and there is absolute truth—God’s truth. Integrity means we do not lower our standards or behavior to impress or to be accepted by others.⁵ You “do what is right” and “let the consequence follow.”⁶ Recent revisions to the *Preach My Gospel* missionary manual notably added integrity as a Christlike attribute.⁷

A number of years ago, Elder Uchtdorf was assigned to reorganize our stake. During our interview, he asked me a question I have not forgotten: “Has there been anything in your life that, if brought to the attention of the public, would be an embarrassment to you or the Church?” Surprised, my mind quickly raced over my entire life, trying to recall those moments when I may have fallen short and asking myself, “If others knew everything I had done, what would they think of me or the Church?”

In the moment, I thought Elder Uchtdorf was only asking about worthiness, but I’ve come to understand it was really a question about integrity. Was I true to what I professed? Would the world see consistency between my words and my deeds? Would others see God through my conduct?



United States

President Spencer W. Kimball taught, “Integrity” is our “willingness and ability to live by our beliefs and commitments.”⁸

True to God

A life of integrity requires us to first and foremost be true to God.

From our early childhood, we learned the story of Daniel in the lions’ den. Daniel was always true to God. His jealous peers “sought to find occasion against [him]”⁹ and contrived a decree mandating prayers to their gods alone. Daniel knew of the decree but went home and—with “his windows being open”¹⁰—knelt and prayed three times a day to the God of Israel. As a result, Daniel was cast into the lions’ den. On the morn, the king found Daniel’s God had delivered him and issued a new decree that all should “tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God.”¹¹

The king came to know God through Daniel’s integrity. Others see God through ours—words and deeds. Just like Daniel, being true to God will increasingly set us apart from the world.

The Savior reminds us, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”¹² President Russell M. Nelson counseled: “[Overcoming the world] means overcoming the temptation to care more about the things of this world than the things of God. It means trusting the doctrine of Christ more than the philosophies of men.”¹³ Likewise, we must resist the temptation to walk “in [our] own way, and after the image of [our] own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world.”¹⁴

The oppositional pull of this world is an essential part of God’s plan of salvation. How we respond to the pull is the essence of who we are—a

measure of our integrity. The worldly pull can be as direct as to destroy fidelity in marriage or as subtle as posting anonymous comments critical of Church doctrine or culture. Exercising integrity in our choices is an outward expression of an inner commitment to follow the Savior Jesus Christ.

True to Others

Just as integrity flows from the first great commandment to love God, being true to each other flows from the second, to love our neighbors as ourselves. A life of integrity is not a life of perfection; it is a life in which we strive every day to foremost be true to God and within that context to be true to others. President Oaks reminds us, “Our zeal to keep [the] second commandment must not cause us to forget the first.”¹⁵

The world increasingly grapples with integrity by imposing codes of conduct or ethical rules that govern the relationships between people and institutions. While good, these rules are generally not anchored in absolute truth and tend to evolve based on cultural acceptance. Similar to the question posed by Elder Uchtdorf, some organizations train employees to consider what their decisions or decision-making process would look like if published online or on the front page of a major newspaper. As the Church comes out of obscurity and darkness,¹⁶ we, like Daniel, must rise above the worldly expectations and become the face of the true and living God at all times and in all places.¹⁷

Saying we have integrity is insufficient if our actions are inconsistent with our words. Likewise, Christian kindness is not a substitute for integrity. As a covenant people, and as leaders of His Church, we must be

beyond reproach and aligned with the standards the Lord has set.

Acting with integrity builds faith and trust and reassures others that we seek only to do the will of the Lord. In our councils, we resist outside influences and follow the Lord's revealed process, seeking insights from each woman and man and acting consistent with the inspired counsel received.¹⁸

Our focus is on the Savior, and we are careful to avoid actions that may be perceived as serving our own interests, benefiting our family, or favoring someone at the expense of another.

We go out of our way to avoid any perception that our actions may be influenced by the honors of men,¹⁹ to receive personal recognition, generate more likes, be quoted or published.

True to Our Divine Identity

Finally, a life of integrity requires us to be true to our divine identity.

We know some who were not. Of particular significance is the anti-Christ Korihor, who led away the hearts of many, appealing to their "carnal mind."²⁰ Yet, in the final moments of his life, he confessed, "I always knew that there was a God."²¹

President Henry B. Eyring has taught that lying "is contrary to the nature of our spirits,"²² our divine identity. Korihor deceived himself, and the truth was not in him.²³

In contrast, the Prophet Joseph Smith confidently proclaimed, "I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it."²⁴

Joseph's brother Hyrum was loved by the Lord "because of the integrity of his heart."²⁵ He and Joseph remained true to the end—true to their divine identity, the light and knowledge they received, and true to the person they knew they could become.



South Africa



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

Conclusion

May we reconcile ourselves “to the will of God”²⁶ and develop the Christlike attribute of integrity. May we follow our Exemplar, the Savior of the world, and not shrink but live a life that is true to God, to each other, and to our divine identity.

As Job said, “Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know mine integrity.”²⁷ In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See Matthew 26:30, 36; Luke 22:39–41.
2. Luke 22:42.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 19:18.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 19:19.
5. See *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ* (2023), 129.
6. “Do What Is Right,” *Hymns*, no. 237.
7. See *Preach My Gospel*, 128–29.
8. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (2006), 126.
9. Daniel 6:4.
10. Daniel 6:10.
11. Daniel 6:26.
12. John 16:33.
13. Russell M. Nelson, “Overcome the World and Find Rest,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2022, 96.
14. Doctrine and Covenants 1:16.
15. Dallin H. Oaks, “Two Great Commandments,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2019, 73.
16. See Doctrine and Covenants 1:30.
17. See Mosiah 18:9.
18. See Doctrine and Covenants 42:2–3; see also *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 4.3, Gospel Library.
19. See Doctrine and Covenants 121:35.
20. Alma 30:53.
21. Alma 30:52.
22. Henry B. Eyring, “Going Home” (Brigham Young University devotional, Nov. 18, 1986), 5, speeches.byu.edu.
23. See 1 John 1:8.
24. Joseph Smith—History 1:25.
25. Doctrine and Covenants 124:15.
26. 2 Nephi 10:24.
27. Job 31:6.

All Will Be Well Because of Temple Covenants

There is nothing more important than honoring the covenants you have made or may make in the temple.

My beloved brothers and sisters, this session of general conference has been, for me, a sacred time. I am grateful for the assignment to speak to the millions of Latter-day Saints and our friends across the world. I love you, and I know the Lord loves you.

Over 50 years ago, I had the privilege to serve as the president of Ricks College in Rexburg, Idaho. On the morning of June 5, 1976, my wife, Kathy, and I drove from Rexburg to the Idaho Falls Idaho Temple to attend the sealing of a close friend. Of course, with four young boys in our home at the time, our temple trip could be only accomplished with the help of a courageous babysitter! We left our precious children in her care and made the short, 30-minute drive.

Our experience in the temple that day was wonderful, as it always was. However, after the conclusion of the temple sealing—and as we were preparing to return home—we noticed many temple workers and patrons nervously conversing in the lobby of the temple. Within moments, one of the temple workers told us that the newly constructed Teton Dam in eastern Idaho had collapsed! More than 80 billion gallons (300 million

cubic meters) of water were flowing through the dam and into the 300 square miles (775 square km) of neighboring valleys. Much of the city of Rexburg was underwater, with homes and vehicles carried away by floodwaters. Two-thirds of the 9,000 residents were suddenly homeless.¹

As you might imagine, our thoughts and concerns turned to the safety of our dear children, hundreds of college students and faculty, and a community we loved. We were less than 30 miles (50 km) from home, and yet on this day, long before cell phones and text messaging, we had no way of communicating immediately with our children, nor could we make the drive from Idaho Falls to Rexburg, as all the roads had been closed.

Our only option was to stay the night in a local motel in Idaho Falls. Kathy and I knelt together in our motel room and humbly pleaded with Heavenly Father for the safety of our dear children and the thousands of others affected by the tragic event. I recall Kathy pacing the floors into the early hours of the morning with worry about her children. Despite my own concerns, I was able to put my mind at ease and fall asleep.



United States

It wasn't long thereafter that my sweet eternal companion woke me and said, "Hal, how can you sleep at a time like this?"

These words then came clearly to my heart and mind. I said to my wife: "Kathy, whatever the outcome, all will be well because of the temple. We have made covenants with God and have been sealed as an eternal family."

At that moment, it was as if the Spirit of the Lord confirmed in our hearts and minds what we both already knew to be true: the sealing ordinances, found only in the house of the Lord and administered by proper priesthood authority, had bound us together as husband and wife, and our children had been sealed to us. There truly was no need to fear, and we were grateful later to learn that our boys were safe.

Perhaps this statement from President Thomas S. Monson best illustrates what Kathy and I felt on

that unforgettable night. "As we attend the temple, there can come to us a dimension of spirituality and a feeling of *peace*. . . . We will grasp the true meaning of the words of the Savior when He said: 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. . . . Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid [John 14:27].'"²

I have been blessed to feel that peace every time I enter the sacred temple. I recall the first day I walked into the Salt Lake Temple. I was a young man.

I looked up at a high white ceiling that made the room so light it seemed almost as if it were open to the sky. And in that moment, the thought came into my mind in clear words: "I have been in this lighted place before." But then immediately there came into my mind, not in my own voice, these words: "No, you have never been here before. You are remembering a moment before you

were born. You were in a sacred place like this where the Lord could come."

Brothers and sisters, I humbly testify that as we attend the temple, we can be reminded of the eternal nature of our spirits, our relationship with the Father and His divine Son, and our ultimate desire to return to our heavenly home.

In recent conference addresses, President Russell M. Nelson taught:

"The safest place to be *spiritually* is living *inside* your temple covenants!"

"*Everything* we believe and *every* promise God has made to His covenant people come together in the temple."³

"Each person who makes covenants . . . in temples—and keeps them—has increased access to the power of Jesus Christ."⁴

He also taught that "once we make a covenant with God, we leave neutral ground forever. God will not abandon His relationship with those who have



God will provide protection from the evil of selfishness and pride.

Consistent care of brothers and sisters for each other will come only with persistent efforts to lead your family in the Lord's way. Give children opportunities to pray for each other. Discern quickly the beginnings of discord, and positively recognize acts of unselfish service, especially to one another. When siblings pray for each other and serve each other, hearts will be softened and turned to each other and to their parents.

In part, that is what is described by Malachi as he foretold of the coming of the prophet Elijah: "He shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers. If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming."⁸

Trials, challenges, and heartaches will surely come to all of us. None of us are immune from "thorns of the flesh."⁹ Yet, as we attend the temple and remember our covenants, we can prepare to receive personal direction from the Lord.

When Kathy and I were married and sealed in the Logan Utah Temple, then-Elder Spencer W. Kimball performed our sealing. In the few words he spoke, he gave this counsel: "Hal and Kathy, live so that when the call comes, you can walk away easily."

Initially, we did not understand what that counsel meant for us, but we did our best to live our lives in such a way that we would be prepared to leave to serve the Lord when the call came. After we had been married nearly 10 years, an unanticipated call did come from the Commissioner of Church Education, Neal A. Maxwell.

The loving counsel given by President Kimball in the temple to be

forged such a bond with Him. In fact, all those who have made a covenant with God have access to a special kind of love and mercy."⁵

Under President Nelson's inspired leadership, the Lord has accelerated, and will continue to accelerate, the building of temples across the world. This will allow all of God's children the opportunity to receive the ordinances of salvation and exaltation and to make and keep sacred covenants. Qualifying to make sacred covenants is not a one-time effort but a lifetime pattern. The Lord has said it will take our full heart, might, mind, and strength.⁶

Frequent participation in the ordinances of the temple can create a pattern of devotion to the Lord. When you keep your temple covenants and

remember them, you invite the companionship of the Holy Ghost to both strengthen and purify you.

You may then experience a feeling of light and hope testifying that the promises are true. You will come to know that every covenant with God is an opportunity to draw closer to Him, which will then create a desire in your heart to keep temple covenants.

We have been promised, "Because of our covenant with God, He will never tire in His efforts to help us, and we will never exhaust His merciful patience with us."⁷

It is through the sealing covenants in the temple that we can receive the assurance of loving family connections that will continue after death and last for eternity. Honoring marriage and family covenants made in temples of

able to “walk away easily” became a reality. Kathy and I received a call to leave what seemed an idyllic family situation in California to serve in an assignment and in a place that I knew nothing about. However, our family was ready to leave because a prophet, in a holy temple, a place of revelation, saw a future event for which we were then prepared.

My dear brothers and sisters, I bear witness that there is nothing more important than honoring the covenants you have made or may make in the temple. No matter where you are on the covenant path, I urge you to qualify and become eligible to

attend the temple. Visit as frequently as circumstances will allow. Make and keep sacred covenants with God. I can assure you of the same truth I shared with Kathy in the middle of the night nearly five decades ago in an Idaho Falls motel room: “No matter the outcome, all will be well because of temple covenants.”

I give you my sure witness that Jesus is the Christ. He lives and leads His Church. Temples are houses of the Lord. President Russell M. Nelson is God’s living prophet on the earth. I love him, and I love each of you. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See “1976: The Teton Dam Failed, KTVB Captured the Aftermath from the Air,” ktvb.com.
2. Thomas S. Monson, “Blessings of the Temple,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2015, 91–92; emphasis added.
3. Russell M. Nelson, “The Temple and Your Spiritual Foundation,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2021, 96, 94.
4. Russell M. Nelson, “Overcome the World and Find Rest,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2022, 96.
5. Russell M. Nelson, “The Everlasting Covenant,” *Liahona*, Oct. 2022, 5.
6. See Doctrine and Covenants 59:5.
7. Russell M. Nelson, “The Everlasting Covenant,” 6.
8. Joseph Smith—History 1:39.
9. See 2 Corinthians 12:7–10.



Taiwan



By Elder David A. Bednar
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

“Be Still, and Know That I Am God”

We can be still and know that God is our Heavenly Father, we are His children, and Jesus Christ is our Savior.

During a recent open house and media day for a new house of the Lord, I led a group of journalists on a tour through the sacred structure. I described the purposes of temples in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and responded to their many excellent questions.

Before entering the celestial room, I explained that this particular room in the house of the Lord symbolically represents the peace and beauty of the heavenly home to which we can return after this life. I indicated to our guests that we would not speak while in the celestial room, but I would be happy to answer any questions after we moved to the next stop on the tour.

After exiting the celestial room and as we gathered at the next location, I asked our guests if they had any observations they wanted to share. One of the journalists said with great emotion, “I have never experienced anything like that in my entire life. I did not know quiet like that existed in the world; I simply did not believe such stillness was possible.”

I was struck by both the sincerity and the starkness of this person’s statement. And the journalist’s

reaction highlighted one important aspect of stillness—overcoming and tuning out the commotion of our external environment.

As I later pondered the journalist’s comment and reflected on the often hectic pace of our modern lives—the busyness, noise, diversions, distractions, and detours that so often seem to demand our attention—a scripture came to my mind: “Be still, and know that I am God.”¹

I pray the Holy Ghost will enlighten each of us as we consider a higher and holier dimension of stillness in our lives—an inner spiritual stillness of the soul that enables us to know and remember that God is our Heavenly Father, we are His children, and Jesus Christ is our Savior. This remarkable blessing is available to all Church members who are striving faithfully to become “covenant people of the Lord.”²

Be Still

In 1833, the Saints in Missouri were the targets of intense persecution. Mobs had driven them from their homes in Jackson County, and some Church members had tried to establish themselves in other nearby

counties. But the persecution continued, and the threats of death were many. In these challenging circumstances, the Lord revealed the following instruction to the Prophet Joseph Smith in Kirtland, Ohio:

“Therefore, let your hearts be comforted concerning Zion; for all flesh is in mine hands; *be still* and know that I am God.”³

I believe the Lord’s admonition to “be still” entails much more than simply not talking or not moving. Perhaps His intent is for us to remember and rely upon Him and His power “at all times and in all things, and in all places that [we] may be in.”⁴ Thus, “be still” may be a way of reminding us to focus upon the Savior unfailingly as the ultimate source of the spiritual stillness of the soul that strengthens us to do and overcome hard things.

Build upon the Rock

True faith is always focused in and on the *Lord Jesus Christ*—in Him as the Divine and Only Begotten Son of the Eternal Father and on Him and the redemptive mission He fulfilled.

“For he hath answered the ends of the law, and he claimeth all those who have faith in him; and they who have faith in him will cleave unto every good thing; wherefore he advocateth the cause of the children of men.”⁵

Jesus Christ is our Redeemer,⁶ our Mediator,⁷ and our Advocate⁸ with the Eternal Father and the rock upon which we should build the spiritual foundation of our lives.

Helaman explained, “Remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build *your* foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon



Malaysia

you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, *because of the rock upon which ye are built*, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall.”⁹

The symbolism of Christ as the “rock” upon whom we should build the foundation of our lives is most instructive. Please note in this verse that the Savior is not the foundation. Rather, we are admonished to build our personal spiritual foundation upon Him.¹⁰

The foundation is the part of a building that connects it to the ground. A strong foundation provides protection from natural disasters and many other destructive forces. A proper foundation also distributes the weight of a structure over a large area to avoid overloading the underlying soil and provides a level surface for construction.

A strong and reliable connection between the ground and a foundation is essential if a structure is to remain sturdy and stable over time. And

for particular types of construction, anchor pins and steel rods can be used to attach the foundation of a building to “bedrock,” the hard, solid rock beneath surface materials such as soil and gravel.

In a similar way, the foundation of our lives must be connected to the rock of Christ if we are to remain firm and steadfast. The sacred covenants and ordinances of the Savior’s restored gospel can be compared to the anchor pins and steel rods used to connect a building to bedrock.



A strong and reliable connection between the ground and a foundation is essential if a structure is to remain sturdy and stable over time.



Sacred covenants and ordinances can be compared to the anchor pins and steel rods used to connect a building to bedrock.

Every time we faithfully receive, review, remember, and renew sacred covenants, our spiritual anchors are secured ever more firmly and steadfastly to the “rock” of Jesus Christ.

“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.”¹¹

Incrementally and increasingly “in process of time,”¹² “virtue [garnishes our] thoughts unceasingly,” our “confidence [waxes stronger and stronger] in the presence of God,” and “the Holy Ghost [is our] constant companion.”¹³ We become more grounded, rooted, established, and

settled.¹⁴ As the foundation of our lives is built upon the Savior, we are blessed to “be still”—to have a spiritual assurance that God is our Heavenly Father, we are His children, and Jesus Christ is our Savior.

Sacred Times, Holy Places, and the Home

The Lord provides both sacred times and holy places to help us experience and learn about this inner stillness of our souls.

For example, the Sabbath is God’s day, a *sacred time* set apart to remember and worship the Father in the name of His Son, to participate in priesthood ordinances, and to receive and renew sacred covenants. Each week we worship the Lord during our home study and also as “fellow-citizens with the saints”¹⁵ during

sacrament and other meetings. On His holy day, our thoughts, actions, and demeanor are signs we give to God and an indicator of our love for Him.¹⁶ Every Sunday, if we will, we can be still and know that God is our Heavenly Father, we are His children, and Jesus Christ is our Savior.

A central feature of our Sabbath worship is to “go to the house of prayer and offer up [our] sacraments upon [the Lord’s] holy day.”¹⁷ The “house[s] of prayer” in which we gather on the Sabbath are meetinghouses and other approved facilities—*holy places* of reverence, worship, and learning. Each meetinghouse and facility is dedicated by priesthood authority as a place where the Spirit of the Lord may dwell and where God’s children may come “to the knowledge of their Redeemer.”¹⁸ If



Scotland

we will, we can “be still” in our holy places of worship and know ever more surely that God is our Heavenly Father, we are His children, and Jesus Christ is our Savior.

The temple is another *holy place* specifically set apart for worshiping and serving God and learning eternal truths. We think, act, and dress differently in the house of the Lord from any other places that we may frequent. In His holy house, if we will, we can be still and know that God is our Heavenly Father, we are His children, and Jesus Christ is our Savior.

The principal purposes of sacred time and holy places are exactly the same: to repeatedly focus our attention upon Heavenly Father and His plan, the Lord Jesus Christ and His Atonement, the edifying power of the Holy Ghost, and the promises associated with the sacred ordinances and covenants of the Savior’s restored gospel.

Today I repeat a principle I previously have emphasized. Our homes should be the ultimate combination of both *sacred time* and *holy place* wherein individuals and families can “be still” and know that God is our Heavenly Father, we are His children, and Jesus Christ is our Savior. Leaving our homes to worship on the Sabbath and in the house of the Lord certainly is essential. But only as we return to our homes with the spiritual perspective and strength obtained in those holy places and activities can we then sustain our focus upon the primary purposes of mortal life and overcome the temptations so prevalent in our fallen world.

Our ongoing Sabbath, temple, and home experiences should fortify us with the power of the Holy Ghost, with an ongoing and stronger



covenant connection to the Father and the Son, and with “a perfect brightness of hope”¹⁹ in God’s eternal promises.

As home and Church are gathered together in one in Christ,²⁰ we may be troubled on every side, but we will not be distressed in our minds and hearts. We may be perplexed by our circumstances and challenges, but we will not be in despair. We may be persecuted, but we will also recognize that we are never alone.²¹ We can receive spiritual strength to become and remain firm, steadfast, and true.

Promise and Testimony

I promise that as we build the foundation of our lives on the “rock” of Jesus Christ, we can be blessed by the Holy Ghost to receive an individual and spiritual stillness of the soul that enables us to know and remember that God is our Heavenly Father, we are His children, Jesus Christ is our Savior, and we can be blessed to do and overcome hard things.

I joyfully witness that God is our Heavenly Father, we are His children, and Jesus Christ is our Redeemer and the “rock” of our salvation. I so testify in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Psalm 46:10; see also Doctrine and Covenants 101:16.
2. 1 Nephi 14:14.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 101:16; emphasis added.
4. Mosiah 18:9.
5. Moroni 7:28.
6. See Mosiah 15:6–9.
7. See 2 Nephi 2:27–28.
8. See Moroni 7:28.
9. Helaman 5:12; emphasis added.
10. Ephesians 2:19–20 indicates that the “household of God” (the Church of Jesus Christ) is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.” Thus, in the analogy used in Ephesians, Jesus Christ is the central component in the foundation upon which **His Church** is built. In contrast, Helaman 5:12 indicates that “it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build *your* foundation” (emphasis added). Thus, the foundation upon which we should build our lives is the “rock of our Redeemer,” “a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall.” Thus, in the analogy used in Helaman, Jesus Christ is the “bedrock” upon which we should build **our individual lives**.
11. Ether 12:4; emphasis added.
12. See Moses 7:18, 21.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 121:45–46.
14. See Colossians 1:23; 2:7; 2 Peter 1:12; Neal A. Maxwell, “Overcome . . . Even As I Also Overcame,” *Ensign*, May 1987, 70–72.
15. Ephesians 2:19.
16. See Russell M. Nelson, “The Sabbath Is a Delight,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2015, 130.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 59:9.
18. Mosiah 18:30.
19. 2 Nephi 31:20.
20. See Ephesians 1:10.
21. See 2 Corinthians 4:8–9.



By Elder Massimo De Feo
Of the Seventy

Rise! He Calleth Thee

The gospel is not a way to avoid challenges and problems but a solution to increase our faith and learn how to deal with them.

Some time ago I asked my wife, “Can you tell me why, as far as I remember, we have never had any major problems in our lives?”

She looked at me and said, “Sure. I’ll tell you why we have never had any major problems; it’s because you have a very short memory!”

Her quick and smart answer made me realize once again that living the gospel of Jesus Christ does not remove pain and trials, which are necessary to grow.

The gospel is not a way to avoid challenges and problems but a solution to increase our faith and learn how to deal with them.

I had a sense of this truth a few months ago when I was walking one day and suddenly my sight became blurry, dark, and wavy. I was scared. Then the doctors told me, “If you don’t begin treatment immediately, you may lose your sight even in a matter of weeks.” I was even more scared.

And then they said, “You need intravitreal injections—injections right in the eye, wide-open eye—every four weeks for the rest of your life.”

That was an uncomfortable wake-up call.

Then a reflection came in the form of a question. I asked myself, “OK! My physical sight is not good, but what about my spiritual vision?”

Do I need any treatment there? And what does it mean to have a clear spiritual vision?”

I pondered about the story of a blind man called Bartimaeus, described in the Gospel of Mark. The scripture says, “And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.”¹

Technically, in the eyes of many, Jesus was just the son of Joseph, so why did Bartimaeus call Him “Son of David”? Simply because he recognized that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, who was prophesied to be born as a descendant of David.²

It is interesting that this blind man, who didn’t have physical sight, recognized Jesus. He saw spiritually what he couldn’t see physically, while many others could see Jesus physically but were totally blind spiritually.

From this story we learn more about clear spiritual vision.

We read, “And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.”³

All around him were telling him to be quiet, but he cried out even more because he knew who Jesus really was. He ignored those voices and screamed even louder.

He acted instead of being acted upon. Despite his limited circumstances, he used his faith to go beyond his limitations.

So, the *first principle* we learn is *we keep a clear spiritual vision when we focus on Jesus Christ and stay true to what we know to be true.*

Brothers and sisters, to keep our spiritual sight intact, we need to decide not to listen to the voices of the world around us. In this confusing and confused world, we must stay faithful to what we know, faithful to our covenants, faithful in keeping the commandments and reaffirm our beliefs even stronger, like this man did. We need to cry even louder our testimony of the Lord to the world. This man knew Jesus, stayed faithful to what he believed, and was not distracted by the voices around him.

There are many voices today trying to lower our voices as disciples of Jesus Christ. The voices of the world are trying to silence us, but that’s exactly why we must declare our testimony of the Savior louder and stronger. Among all the voices of the world, the Lord is counting on me and you to declare our testimonies, to raise our voice, and to become His voice. If we don’t do it, who will testify of Jesus Christ? Who will speak His name and declare His divine mission?

We have a spiritual charge that comes from our knowledge of Jesus Christ.

But what did Bartimaeus do after that?

At the Lord’s command to *rise*, he acted again in faith.

The scripture says, “And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus.”⁴

This humble and faithful man understood that he could rise to a better life at Jesus’s command. He

knew that he was better than his circumstances, and the very first thing he did when he heard Jesus calling him was to throw away his beggar's coat.

Again he acted instead of being acted upon.

He might have thought, "I don't need this anymore, now that Jesus has come into my life. This is a new day. I'm done with this life of misery. With Jesus I can start a new life of happiness and joy in Him, with Him, and through Him. And I don't care what the world thinks of me. Jesus is calling me, and He will help me live a new life."

What a remarkable change!

As he threw away his beggar's coat, he got rid of all excuses.

And this is a *second principle: we keep a clear spiritual vision when we leave the natural man behind, repent, and begin a new life in Christ.*

The way to do it is by making and keeping covenants to rise to a better life through Jesus Christ.

As long as we make excuses to feel sorry for ourselves, sorry for our circumstances and problems, and sorry for all the bad things happening in our lives and even all the bad people who *we think* make us unhappy, we keep the beggar's coat on our shoulders. It is true that at times people, consciously or not, hurt us. But we need to decide to act with faith in Christ by removing the mental and emotional coat that we might still wear to hide excuses or sin and throw it away, knowing that He can and will heal us.

There is never a good excuse to say, "I am the way I am because of some unfortunate and unpleasant circumstances. And I cannot change, and I am justified."

When we think that way, we decide to be acted upon.



We keep the beggar's coat.

Acting in faith means to rely on our Savior, believing that through His Atonement, we can *rise* above everything at His command.

The third principle is in the last four words: “[he] came to Jesus.”

How could he go to Jesus since he was blind? The only way was to walk toward Jesus by hearing His voice.

And this is a *third principle: we keep a clear spiritual vision when we hear the voice of the Lord and allow Him to guide us.*

Just as this man raised his voice over the voices around him, he was able to listen to the voice of the Lord in the middle of all other voices.

This is the same faith that allowed Peter to walk on water as long as he kept his spiritual focus on the Lord and was not distracted by the winds around him.

Then the story of this blind man ends with the words “he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.”⁵

One of the most important lessons in this story is that this man exercised true faith in Jesus Christ and received a miracle because he asked with *real intent*, the *real intent* to follow Him.

And this is the ultimate reason for the blessings we receive in our lives, which is to follow Jesus Christ. It is about recognizing *Him*, making and keeping covenants with God *because of Him*, changing our very nature *through Him*, and enduring to the end by following *Him*.

For me, keeping a clear spiritual vision is all about focusing on Jesus Christ.

So is my spiritual sight clear as I get my eye injections? Well, who am I to say? But I am grateful for what I see.

I clearly see the hand of the Lord in this sacred work and in my life.

I see the faith of many wherever I go who strengthen my own faith.

I see angels all around me.

I see the faith of many who don't see the Lord physically but recognize Him spiritually, because they know Him intimately.

I testify that this gospel is the answer for everything, because Jesus Christ is the answer for everyone. I am grateful for what I can see as I follow my Savior.

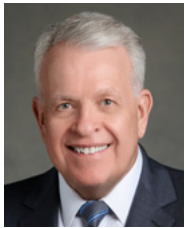
I promise that as we hear the voice of the Lord and allow Him to guide us on the Savior's covenant path, we will be blessed with clear vision, spiritual understanding, and peace of heart and mind throughout our lives.

May we cry our testimony of Him louder than the voices around us in a world that needs to hear more of Jesus Christ and not less. May we remove the beggar's coat that we might still wear and rise above the world to a better life in and through Christ. May we get rid of all excuses not to follow Jesus Christ and find all good reasons to follow Him as we hear His voice. This is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Mark 10:47.
2. See Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; Matthew 21:9.
3. Mark 10:48.
4. Mark 10:50.
5. Mark 10:52.





By Elder Brent H. Nielson
Of the Presidency of the Seventy

A Record of What I Have Both Seen and Heard

There has never been a better time to be a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

After I graduated from law school, my wife, Marcia, and I chose to join a law firm that specialized in trial law. As I began my on-the-job training, I spent much of my time preparing witnesses to testify at trial. I quickly learned that facts were determined in a courtroom as witnesses, under oath, testified to the truthfulness of what they had both seen and heard. As witnesses testified, their words were both recorded and preserved. The importance of credible witnesses was always at the forefront of my preparation.

It didn't take long for me to realize that the very same terms I was using every day as a lawyer were also the terms I used in my gospel conversations. "Witness" and "testimony" are terms that we use as we share our knowledge and feelings about the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When I was sustained as a new Area Seventy, I opened the scriptures to learn my duties and read Doctrine and Covenants 107:25, which states, "The Seventy are also called . . . to be especial witnesses unto the Gentiles and in all the world." As you can imagine, my eyes were drawn to the term "especial witnesses." It became clear to me that I had a responsibility to bear my witness—to testify of the

name of Jesus Christ—wherever I traveled in the world.

There are many examples in the scriptures of those who were eyewitnesses and who testified to what they both saw and heard.

As the ancient prophet Mormon begins his record, he writes, "And now I, Mormon, make a record of the things which I have both seen and heard, and call it the Book of Mormon."¹

The Savior's Apostles Peter and John healed a man in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.² When commanded not to speak in the name of Jesus, they responded:

"Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

"For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."³

Another compelling testimony comes from the Book of Mormon Saints who witnessed the visit of the Savior Jesus Christ. Listen to this description of their witness: "And after this manner do they bear record: The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father."⁴

Brothers and sisters, today I declare my witness and make a record of what I have both seen and heard during

my sacred ministry as a Seventy of the Lord Jesus Christ. In doing so, I testify to you of a loving Heavenly Father and His benevolent Son, Jesus Christ, who suffered, died, and rose again to offer eternal life to God's children. I testify of "a marvelous work and a wonder"⁵ and that the Lord has set His hand once again to restore His gospel on the earth through His living prophets and apostles.⁶ I testify that based upon what I have both seen and heard, there has never been a better time to be a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints than today. I know this of my own knowledge, independent of any other source, because of what I have both seen and heard.

During my senior year of high school, to graduate from seminary I had to identify all 15 temples of the Church. A picture of each temple was at the front of our classroom, and I had to know where each was located. Now, years later, it would be an enormous challenge—with 335 operating or announced temples—to identify each one. I have personally seen many of these houses of the Lord and testify that the Lord is offering His blessings and ordinances to more and more of His children across the world.

My friends at FamilySearch have taught me that over one million new names are added to FamilySearch each



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day. If you didn't find your ancestor yesterday, I invite you to look again tomorrow. When it comes to gathering Israel on the other side of the veil, there has never been a better time to be a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints than today.

As we raised our children in Twin Falls, Idaho, our perspective of the worldwide Church was limited. When I was called to be a General Authority, Marcia and I were assigned to serve in the Pacific Area, a place we had never been. We were pleased to find stakes from the top of New Zealand to the bottom, with a temple that was dedicated in 1958. It was one of those 15 I had to memorize in seminary. We found temples in every major city of Australia, with stakes across that continent. We had assignments in Samoa, where there are 25 stakes, and Tonga, where almost half the population are members of the Church. We had an assignment on the island of Kiribati, where we found two stakes. We had assignments to visit stakes in Ebeye in the Marshall Islands and Daru in Papua New Guinea.

After our service in the Pacific Islands, we were assigned to serve in the Philippines. To my surprise, the Church of Jesus Christ in the Philippines is growing beyond anything I had realized. There are now 125 stakes, 23 missions, and 13 operating or announced temples. I witnessed a church of over 850,000 members in that country. How had I missed the establishment of Christ's Church across the world?

After three years in the Philippines, I was asked to serve in the Missionary Department. My assignment took us to missions all over the world. My view of the Savior's worldwide Church expanded exponentially. Marcia and I were assigned to visit missions in Asia. We found a beautiful



COME UNTO JESUS BY MICHAEL MALM

stake center in Singapore, with amazing, faithful members. We visited members and missionaries in a chapel in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia. We met missionaries in Hong Kong and participated in a wonderful stake conference with faithful, devoted Saints.

This experience was repeated as we met missionaries and members across Europe, in Latin America, in the Caribbean, and in Africa. The Church of Jesus Christ is experiencing tremendous growth in Africa.

I am an eyewitness to the ongoing Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the fulfilling of the prophecy of Joseph Smith that “the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear.”⁷

Our wonderful missionaries who now cover the globe are 74,000 strong. Working together with members, they baptize over 20,000 people every month. It has recently been 18-, 19-, and 20-year-old young men and young women who, with the help of the Lord, have produced this mighty miracle of gathering. We find these young women and young men in the small villages of Vanuatu and in the large cities of New York, Paris, and London. I have watched them teach about the Savior in remote congregations in Fiji and larger gatherings in places like Texas, California, and Florida in the United States.

You will find missionaries in every corner of the earth speaking

60 different languages and fulfilling the Savior's great commission in Matthew 28: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”⁸ I honor the past and current missionaries of the Church and remind our rising generation of President Russell M. Nelson's invitation to come and gather Israel.⁹

I testify today that I have observed this profound Restoration of the Savior's gospel with my own eyes and heard it with my own ears. I am a witness of God's work across the world. There has never been a better time to be a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints than today.

Perhaps the most inspiring miracle of the Restoration that I have witnessed is you, the faithful members of the Church in every land. You, the Latter-day Saints, are described by Nephi in the Book of Mormon as he saw our day and testified, “And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the power of the Lamb of God, that it descended upon the saints of the church of the Lamb, and upon the covenant people of the Lord, who were scattered upon all the face of the earth; and they were armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory.”¹⁰

I testify that I have seen with my own eyes what Nephi saw—you, the covenant Saints in every land, armed with righteousness and the power of God. As I was at the pulpit in one of these great nations of the world, the Lord impressed upon my mind something that King Benjamin taught in Mosiah 2 in the Book of Mormon. Brent, “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.”¹¹



By Elder Jose L. Alonso
Of the Seventy

I witness to you that I have seen this with my own eyes and heard it with my own ears as I have met you, faithful Saints of God across the earth who keep the commandments. You are the covenant children of the Father. You are disciples of Jesus Christ. You also know what I know because you have received your personal witness of the truthfulness of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. The Savior taught, “But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.”¹²

Under the direction of the Lord and the leadership of His prophets and apostles, we will continue to prepare missionaries, make and keep sacred covenants, establish Christ’s Church across the world, and receive the blessings that come as we keep the commandments of God. We are united. We are God’s children. We know Him and we love Him.

I join all of you, my friends, as we unitedly testify that these things are true. We make a record of what we have both seen and heard. You and I are witnesses who testify. It is with the power of this united witness that we continue to move forward with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His gospel. I declare my witness that Jesus Christ lives. He is our Savior and our Redeemer. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Mormon 1:1.
2. See Acts 3:6.
3. Acts 4:19–20.
4. 3 Nephi 17:16.
5. 2 Nephi 27:26; see also Isaiah 29:14.
6. See 2 Nephi 29:1.
7. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 444.
8. Matthew 28:19.
9. See Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel” (worldwide youth devotional, June 3, 2018), Gospel Library; Russell M. Nelson, “Preaching the Gospel of Peace,” *Liahona*, May 2022, 6–7.
10. 1 Nephi 14:14.
11. Mosiah 2:41.
12. Matthew 13:16.

Jesus Christ at the Center of Our Lives

The profound questions of the soul, those that surface in our darkest hours and highest trials, are addressed through the unwavering love of Jesus Christ.

As we journey through mortality, we are at times beset by trials: the severe pain of the loss of loved ones, the arduous fight against illness, the sting of injustice, the harrowing experiences of harassment or abuse, the shadow of unemployment, familial tribulations, the silent cry of loneliness, or the heartrending consequences of armed conflicts.¹ In such moments, our souls yearn for refuge.² We seek earnestly to know: Where may we find the balm of peace?³ In whom can we place our trust to help us with the confidence and strength to surmount these challenges?⁴ Who possesses the patience, the encompassing love, and the omnipotent hand to uplift and sustain us?

The profound questions of the soul, those that surface in our darkest hours and highest trials, are addressed through the unwavering love of Jesus Christ.⁵ In Him, and through the promised blessings of His restored gospel,⁶ we find the answers we seek. It is through His infinite Atonement that we are offered a gift beyond measure—one of hope, healing, and the assurance of His constant,

enduring presence in our lives.⁷ This gift is available to all who reach out with faith, embracing the peace and redemption He so freely offers.

The Lord extends His hand to each of us, a gesture that is the very essence of His divine love and kindness. His invitation to us transcends a simple call; it is a divine pledge, reinforced by the enduring power of His grace. In the scriptures, He lovingly assures us:

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”⁸

The clarity of His invitation “come unto me” and “take my yoke” affirms the profound nature of His promise—a promise so vast and complete that it embodies His love, offering us a solemn guarantee: “Ye shall find rest.”

As we diligently seek spiritual guidance,⁹ we embark on a deeply transformative odyssey that strengthens

our testimonies. As we comprehend the vastness of our Heavenly Father's and Jesus Christ's perfect love,¹⁰ our hearts are filled with gratitude, humility,¹¹ and a renewed desire to pursue the path of discipleship.¹²

President Russell M. Nelson taught that "when the focus of our lives is on God's plan of salvation . . . and Jesus Christ and His gospel, we can feel joy regardless of what is happening—or not happening—in our lives. Joy comes from and because of Him."¹³

Alma, speaking to his son Helaman, declared: "And now, O my son Helaman, behold, thou art in thy youth, and therefore, I beseech of thee that thou wilt hear my words and learn of me; for I do know that whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions,

and shall be lifted up at the last day."¹⁴

Helaman, speaking to his sons, taught about this eternal principle of putting the Savior at the center of our lives: "Remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation."¹⁵

In Matthew 14 we learn that after hearing of John the Baptist's death, Jesus sought solitude. However, a large crowd followed Him. Moved by compassion and love, and not allowing His grief to distract Him from His mission, Jesus welcomed them, healing the sick among them. As evening approached, the disciples faced a daunting challenge: a multitude of people with scant food available. They proposed that Jesus send the crowd away to procure food, but Jesus, with high love and high

expectations, asked the disciples to feed them instead.

While the disciples were preoccupied with the immediate challenge, Jesus demonstrated His trust in and love for His Father, coupled with an unwavering love for the people. He directed the crowd to sit on the grass, and taking only five loaves and two fish, He chose to give thanks to His Father, acknowledging God's provision over His authority and power.

After He gave thanks, Jesus broke the bread, and the disciples distributed it to the people. Miraculously, the food not only sufficed but was abundant, with 12 baskets of leftovers. The group fed included five thousand men, along with women and children.¹⁶

This miracle teaches a profound lesson: when confronted with challenges,





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it's easy to become engrossed in our difficulties. However, Jesus Christ exemplified the power of focusing on His Father, offering gratitude, and acknowledging that solutions to our trials do not always lie within ourselves but with God.¹⁷

When we encounter difficulties, we naturally tend to concentrate on the obstacles we face. Our challenges are tangible and command our attention, yet the principle of surmounting them is in our focus. By placing Christ at the core of our thoughts and deeds, we align ourselves with His outlook and strength.¹⁸ This adjustment does not discount our struggles; instead, it helps us to navigate through them

under divine guidance.¹⁹ As a result, we discover solutions and support that arise from a higher wisdom. Adopting this Christ-centric perspective empowers us with the fortitude and insight to turn our trials into victories,²⁰ reminding us that with the Savior, what seems like a major problem can become a pathway to greater spiritual progress.

The story of Alma the Younger in the Book of Mormon presents a compelling narrative of redemption and the profound impact of centering one's life around Christ. At first, Alma stood as an opponent of the Lord's Church, leading many astray from the path of righteousness. However,

a divine intervention, marked by an angelic visitation, awakened him from his wrongdoings.

In his darkest hour, tormented by guilt and desperate to find a way out of his spiritual anguish, Alma remembered his father's teachings about Jesus Christ and the power of His Atonement. With a heart yearning for redemption, he earnestly repented and pleaded fervently for the Lord's mercy. This crucial moment of complete surrender, bringing Christ to the forefront of his thoughts as Alma earnestly sought His mercy, triggered a remarkable transformation. The heavy chains of guilt and despair vanished and were replaced by an overwhelming sense of joy and peace.²¹

Jesus Christ is our hope and the answer to life's greatest pains. Through His sacrifice, He paid for our sins and took upon Himself all of our suffering—pain, injustice, sorrow, and fear—and He forgives and heals us when we trust in Him and seek to change our lives for the better. He is our Healer,²² comforting and repairing our hearts through His love and power, just like He healed many during His time on earth.²³ He is the living water, fulfilling the deepest needs of our souls with His constant love and kindness. This is like the promise He made to the Samaritan woman at the well, offering “a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”²⁴

I bear solemn witness that Jesus Christ lives, that He presides over this, His sacred Church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.²⁵ I testify that He is the Savior of the world, the Prince of Peace,²⁶ the King of kings, the Lord of lords,²⁷ the Redeemer of the world. I affirm with certainty that we are ever present in His mind and heart. As a testament



By Elder Gerrit W. Gong
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

to this, He has restored His Church in these latter days and has called President Russell M. Nelson as His prophet and the President of the Church at this time.²⁸ I know that Jesus Christ gave His life so that we might have eternal life.

As we strive to place Him at the center of our lives, revelations unfold to us, His profound peace envelops us, and His infinite Atonement brings about our forgiveness and healing.²⁹ It is in Him that we discover the strength to overcome, the courage to persevere, and the peace that surpasses all understanding. May we strive each day to draw nearer to Him, the source of all that is good,³⁰ the beacon of hope in our journey back to the presence of our Heavenly Father. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See Psalm 23:4; 2 Corinthians 1:3–4.
2. See Psalm 46:1.
3. See Jeremiah 8:22.
4. See Isaiah 41:10; Ether 12:27.
5. See John 3:16; Romans 8:38–39.
6. See Acts 3:20–21; 3 Nephi 20:29–31.
7. See Isaiah 53:5; Alma 34:10–14.
8. Matthew 11:28–30.
9. See Proverbs 3:5–6; James 1:5.
10. See Romans 8:39; 1 John 4:16.
11. See 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Mosiah 4:11.
12. See Matthew 16:24; 2 Nephi 31:19–20.
13. Russell M. Nelson, “Joy and Spiritual Survival,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2016, 82.
14. Alma 36:3.
15. Helaman 5:12.
16. See Matthew 14:13–21.
17. See Proverbs 3:5–6; Philippians 4:6–7.
18. See 2 Corinthians 12:9–10.
19. See Psalm 32:8; Ether 12:27.
20. See Romans 8:28; 1 Nephi 3:7.
21. See Alma 36:5–20.
22. See Psalm 147:3; 1 Peter 2:24.
23. See Isaiah 53:4–5.
24. John 4:14; see also Isaiah 12:3.
25. See Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:22–23.
26. See Isaiah 9:6.
27. See 1 Timothy 6:15.
28. See Amos 3:7; Doctrine and Covenants 1:38.
29. See John 3:16; Alma 34:14.
30. See Deuteronomy 31:6; Philippians 4:13; Moroni 10:32.

All Things for Our Good

In time and eternity, the purpose of Creation and the nature of God Himself are to bring all things together for our good.

Today is April 6, the anniversary of Jesus Christ restoring His latter-day Church—and part of the Easter season, when we joyfully testify of Jesus Christ’s perfect life, atoning sacrifice, and glorious Resurrection.

A Chinese story begins as a man’s son finds a beautiful horse.

“How fortunate,” the neighbors say.

“We’ll see,” says the man.

Then the son falls off the horse and is permanently injured.

“How unfortunate,” the neighbors say.

“We’ll see,” says the man.

A conscripting army comes but doesn’t take the injured son.

“How fortunate,” the neighbors say.

“We’ll see,” says the man.

This fickle world often feels tempest tossed, uncertain, sometimes fortunate, and—too often—unfortunate. Yet, in this world of tribulation,¹ “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God.”² Indeed, as we walk uprightly and remember our covenants, “all things shall work together for your good.”³

All things for our good.

A remarkable promise! Comforting assurance from God Himself! In a miraculous way, the purpose of Creation and the nature of God are to know beginning and end,⁴ to bring about all that is for our good, and to

help us become sanctified and holy through Jesus Christ’s grace and Atonement.

Jesus Christ’s Atonement can deliver and redeem us from sin. But Jesus Christ also intimately understands our every pain, affliction, sickness,⁵ sorrow, separation. In time and eternity, His triumph over death and hell can make all things right.⁶ He helps heal the broken and disparaged, reconcile the angry and divided, comfort the lonely and isolated, encourage the uncertain and imperfect, and bring forth miracles possible only with God.

We sing hallelujah and shout hosanna! With eternal power and infinite goodness, in God’s plan of happiness all things can work together for our good. We can face life with confidence and not fear.

Left on our own, we may not know our own good. When “I choose me,” I am also choosing my own limitations, weaknesses, inadequacies. Ultimately, to do the most good, we must be good.⁷ Since none save God is good,⁸ we seek perfection in Jesus Christ.⁹ We become our truest, best selves only as we put off the natural man or woman and become a child before God.

With our trust and faith in God, trials and afflictions can be consecrated



Canada

for our good. Joseph, sold into slavery in Egypt, later saved his family and people. The Prophet Joseph Smith's incarceration in Liberty Jail taught him "these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good."¹⁰ Lived with faith, trials and sacrifices we would never choose can bless us and others in ways never imagined.¹¹

We increase faith and trust in the Lord that all things can work together for our good as we gain eternal perspective;¹² understand our trials may be "but for a small moment";¹³ recognize affliction can be consecrated for our gain;¹⁴ acknowledge accidents, untimely death, debilitating illness, and disease are part of mortality; and trust loving Heavenly Father does not give trials to punish or judge. He would not give a stone to someone asking for bread nor a serpent to one asking for a fish.¹⁵

When trials come, often what we most want is for someone to listen and be with us.¹⁶ In the moment, cliché answers can be unhelpful, however comforting their intent. Sometimes we yearn for someone

who will grieve, ache, and weep with us; let us express pain, frustration, sometimes even anger; and acknowledge with us there are things we do not know.

When we trust God and His love for us, even our greatest heartbreaks can, in the end, work together for our good.

I remember the day I received word of a serious car accident which involved those I love. At such times, in anguish and faith, we can only say with Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."¹⁷

Across the worldwide Church, some 3,500 stakes and districts and some 30,000 wards and branches provide refuge and safety.¹⁸ But within our stakes and wards, many faithful families and individuals confront difficult challenges, even while knowing that (without yet knowing how) things will work together for our good.

In Huddersfield, England, Brother Samuel Bridgstock was diagnosed with stage-four cancer shortly before the calling of a new stake president.

Given his dire diagnosis, he asked his wife, Anna, why he would even go to be interviewed.

"Because," Sister Bridgstock said, "you're going to be called as stake president."

Initially given a year or two to live, President Bridgstock (who is here today) is now in his fourth year of service. He has good and hard days. His stake is rallying with increased faith, service, and kindness. It is not easy, but his wife and family live with faith, gratitude, and understandable sadness they trust will become eternal joy through Jesus Christ's restoring Atonement.¹⁹

When we are still, open, and reverent, we may feel the beauty, purpose, and serenity of the covenant belonging the Lord offers. In sacred moments, He may let us glimpse the larger eternal reality of which our daily lives are part, where small and simple things work together for the good of givers and receivers.

Rebekah, the daughter of my first mission president, shared how the Lord answered her prayer for comfort with an unexpected opportunity to answer someone else's prayer.

Late one evening, Rebekah, grieving her mother's recent passing, had a clear impression to go buy gas for her car. When she arrived at the station, she met an elderly woman struggling



The Bridgstock family has faith in eternal joy through Jesus Christ's restoring Atonement.

to breathe with a large oxygen tank. Later, Rebekah was able to give the woman her mother's portable oxygen machine. This sister gratefully said, "You've given me back my freedom." Things work together for good when we minister as Jesus Christ would.

A father assigned with his teacher-age son as ministering companions explained, "Ministering is when we go from being neighbors who bring cookies to trusted friends, spiritual first responders." Covenant belonging in Jesus Christ comforts, connects, consecrates.

Even in tragedy, spiritual preparation may remind us Heavenly Father knew when we felt most vulnerable and alone. For example, a family whose child was taken to the hospital later found comfort in remembering the Holy Ghost had whispered in advance what to expect.

Sometimes the larger eternal reality the Lord lets us feel includes family across the veil. A sister found joy in conversion to Jesus Christ's restored gospel. Yet two traumas had deeply impacted her life—seeing a boating accident and tragically losing her mother, who had taken her own life.

Yet this sister overcame her fear of water enough to be baptized by immersion. And on what became a very happy day, she witnessed

someone, acting as proxy for her deceased mother, be baptized in the temple. "Temple baptism healed my mother, and it freed me," the sister said. "It was the first time I felt peace since my mother died."

Our sacred music echoes His assurance that all things can work together for our good.

*Be still, my soul: Thy God doth undertake
To guide the future as he has the past.
Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing
shake;
All now mysterious shall be bright at last.*²⁰

*Come, come, ye Saints, no toil nor labor
fear;
But with joy wend your way.
Though hard to you this journey may
appear,
Grace shall be as your day. . . .
And should we die before our journey's
through,
Happy day! All is well!*²¹

The Book of Mormon is evidence we can hold in our hand that Jesus is the Christ and God fulfills His prophecies. Written by inspired prophets who saw our day, the Book of Mormon begins with raw drama—a family dealing with deep differences. Yet, as we study and ponder 1 Nephi 1 through to Moroni 10, we are drawn to Jesus Christ with a firm testimony

that what happened there and then can bless us here and now.

As the Lord, through His living prophet, brings more houses of the Lord closer in more places, temple blessings work together for our good. We come by covenant and ordinance to God our Father and Jesus Christ and gain eternal perspective on mortality. One by one, name by name, we offer beloved family members—ancestors—sacred ordinances and covenant blessings in the Lord's pattern of saviors on Mount Zion.²²

As temples come closer to us in many places, a temple sacrifice we can offer is to seek holiness in the house of the Lord more frequently. For many years, we have saved, planned, and sacrificed to come to the temple. Now, as circumstances permit, please come even more often to the Lord in His holy house. Let regular temple worship and service bless, protect, and inspire you and your family—the family you have or the family you will have and become someday.

Also, where your circumstances permit, please consider the blessing of owning your own temple clothes.²³ A grandmother from a humble family said of anything in the world, what she most wanted were her own temple clothes. Her grandson said, "Grandma whispered, 'I will serve in my own temple clothes, and after



"You've given me back my freedom," a grateful sister told Rebekah.



This sister overcame her fear of water enough to be baptized by immersion.



A grandmother from a humble family said what she wanted most were her own temple clothes.

I die, I will be buried in them.” And when the time came, she was.

As President Russell M. Nelson teaches, “*Everything* we believe and *every* promise God has made to His covenant people come together in the temple.”²⁴

In time and eternity, the purpose of Creation and the nature of God Himself are to bring all things together for our good.

This is the Lord’s eternal purpose. It is His eternal perspective. It is His eternal promise.

When life is cluttered and purpose isn’t clear, when you want to live better but don’t know how, please come to God our Father and Jesus Christ. Trust They live, love you, and want all things for your good. I testify They do, infinitely and eternally, in the sacred and holy name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See John 16:33.
2. Romans 8:28.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 90:24. The popular phrase “It’s all good” often implies things are OK and in order, without necessarily meaning they are actually for our good.
4. See Moses 1:3.
5. See Alma 7:11.
6. See 2 Nephi 9:10–12. God respects moral agency, sometimes allowing even the unrighteous acts of others to affect us. But as we willingly seek to do all we can, Jesus Christ’s grace and His enabling and atoning power can cleanse, heal, bind up, reconcile us with ourselves and each other, on both sides of the veil.
7. See Moroni 7:6, 10–12. Professor Terry Warner writes perceptively on this topic.
8. See Romans 3:10; Moroni 10:25.
9. See Moroni 10:32.
10. See Doctrine and Covenants 122:4, 7.
11. We learn by experiences we would never choose. Sometimes bearing burdens with the Lord’s help can increase our capacity to bear those burdens; Mosiah 24:10–15 illustrates the Lord’s promise to “visit my people in their afflictions” and to “strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens.” Alma 33:23 teaches that our “burdens may be light, through the joy of his Son.” Mosiah 18:8 reminds us that when we are “willing to bear one another’s burdens . . . they may be light.”
12. The prophet Isaiah speaks of the Messiah: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, . . . to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” (Isaiah 61:1–3). Likewise, the psalmist offers the Lord’s promised perspective: “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psalm 30:5). This includes the glorious promises for the righteous on the morning of the First Resurrection.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 122:4. Believing trials may be for what is in eternity a “small moment” does not mean to downplay or make less trying or challenging the agonizing pain or suffering we may experience day after day in this life, the unbearable sleepless nights, or the excruciating uncertainties of each new day.



Scotland



By Brother Michael T. Nelson
Second Counselor in the Young Men General Presidency

In Support of the Rising Generation

It is relationships in the lives of the youth that have the greatest influence on their choices.

Perhaps the promise of being able to look back and see our mortal suffering in light of God’s compassion and eternal view adds some perspective to our understanding of mortality and our hope to endure with faith and trust in Him to the end. Also, when we have eyes to see, there is often good in the now; we need not necessarily wait for a future time to see good.

- 14. See 2 Nephi 2:2.
- 15. See Matthew 7:9–10. Letting God prevail in our lives is not passively to accept whatever comes. It is actively to believe that Heavenly Father and our Savior, Jesus Christ, want only and always what is best for us. When tragedy strikes, we can ask with faith, not “Why me?” but “What can I learn?” And we can mourn with broken hearts and contrite spirits, knowing, in His time and way, compensating blessings and opportunities will come.
- 16. We have covenanted to mourn with those who mourn and comfort those who stand in need of comfort (see Mosiah 18:9).
- 17. Job 1:21.
- 18. See Doctrine and Covenants 115:6.
- 19. Faith in the face of difficulty is the opposite of the existential anguish and despair the Book of Mormon describes of those who “curse God, and wish to die” but who “nevertheless . . . would struggle with the sword for their lives” (Mormon 2:14).
- 20. “Be Still, My Soul,” *Hymns*, no. 124.
- 21. “Come, Come, Ye Saints,” *Hymns*, no. 30. Consider also:
How great the wisdom and the love. . . .
Redemption’s grand design,
Where justice, love, and mercy meet
In harmony divine!
 (“How Great the Wisdom and the Love,” *Hymns*, no. 195.)
Amid life’s uncertainties, we know redemption’s grand design will bring justice, love, and mercy together for our good.
- 22. See Obadiah 1:21. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught: “How are they [the Latter-day Saints] to become saviors on Mount Zion? By building their temples, erecting their baptismal fonts, and going forth and receiving all the ordinances . . . in behalf of all their progenitors who are dead” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 473).
- 23. Members attending the temple for the first time can purchase temple clothes at a significant discount.
- 24. Russell M. Nelson, “The Temple and Your Spiritual Foundation,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2021, 94.

In preparing to speak to you, I have been drawn to the story of Helaman and the stripling sons of the people of Ammon. I have felt the power of Book of Mormon prophets teaching parents, bishops, and ward members through studying this account.

Helaman was a man that the young Ammonites could trust. He helped them develop and mature in righteousness. They knew and loved him and “would that [he] should be their leader.”¹

Helaman loved these young men like sons and saw their potential.² Elder Dale G. Renlund taught that “to effectively serve others we must see them . . . through Heavenly Father’s eyes. Only then can we begin to comprehend the true worth of a soul. Only then can we sense the love that Heavenly Father has for all . . . His children.”³ Bishops today are blessed with discernment to see the divine identity of the youth in their care.

Helaman “numbered”⁴ the young men in his care. He prioritized building strong relationships with them.

At a critical time when life and death hung in the balance, Helaman and his young warriors lost track of the army pursuing them. Helaman counseled with the youth:

“Behold, we know not but they have halted for the purpose that we should come against them. . . .

“Therefore what say ye, my sons . . . ?”⁵

These faithful young men responded, “Father, behold our God is with us, and he will not suffer that we should fall; then let us go forth.”⁶ The day was won, as Helaman supported these young men in their resolve⁷ to act.⁸

The young Ammonites had a great cause and were valiant in “the support of the people.”⁹ “This little force,” led by Helaman, spread “great hopes and much joy”¹⁰ into the hearts of the experienced Nephite armies. Bishops today can lead their uniquely gifted youth in blessing the ward and gathering Israel. President Russell M. Nelson has taught that this is the mission “for which [they] were sent to earth.”¹¹

Like these young Ammonites who were “true at all times in whatsoever thing they were entrusted,”¹² Helaman faithfully followed his leaders. No matter the challenge or setback, Helaman always remained “fixed with a determination”¹³ to advance their purpose. When he was directed to “march forth with [his] little sons,”¹⁴ he obeyed.

The youth today are blessed as bishops follow the guidance of our leaders to “counsel with the ward Young Women president[s].”¹⁵ Stake presidents ensure that bishops and Young Women presidents are instructed in fulfilling their responsibilities for the youth.¹⁶

Helaman honored covenants. When Ammon taught the gospel to the parents of the stripling young men, these parents embraced it with open hearts. They were so committed to their new life of righteous discipleship that they made a covenant to “lay down the weapons of their rebellion.”¹⁷ The only thing that caused them to consider breaking this covenant, going back to



their familiar past of fighting, was seeing the Nephites in danger.

The Ammonites wanted to help these people who had offered them a safe home. Helaman, along with others, persuaded them to keep their covenant never to fight. He trusted more in the strength that God would provide than in the strength these Ammonites could have provided with their swords and arrows.

When Helaman and his young warriors faced daunting challenges, Helaman was resolute. “Behold, it mattereth not—we trust God will deliver us.”¹⁸ In one instance, when they were on the verge of starving to death, their response was to “pour out [their] souls in prayer to God, that he would strengthen [them] and deliver [them]; . . . [and] the Lord . . . did visit [them] with assurances that he would deliver [them]”¹⁹ “because of their exceeding faith in that which they had been taught to believe.”²⁰

We learn from Helaman that these young men were supported by their parents. These faithful parents knew they had the primary responsibility for teaching their children. They taught their children to keep the commandments and “walk uprightly”²¹ before God. Their mothers taught them “that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them.”²² Their fathers set a powerful example of covenant making.²³ These former warriors knew the horrors of battle. They entrusted their inexperienced sons to Helaman’s care and supported them by sending “many provisions.”²⁴

Helaman wasn’t alone as he served his young army. He had people around him whom he turned to for support and guidance. He reached out to Captain Moroni for help, and it came.

No one serving in the Lord’s kingdom serves alone. The Lord has

blessed us with wards and stakes. Through His restored organization, we have the resources, wisdom, and inspiration to meet any challenge.

A bishop provides guidance for the ward through councils.²⁵ He promotes quarterly ministering interviews and then encourages the elders quorum and Relief Society to fulfill their responsibility of ministering to families. These presidencies take the lead in assessing needs and finding inspired solutions. Stake presidents offer support by instructing the elders quorum and Relief Society presidencies in these responsibilities.

The needed guidance for leaders and parents is found in the Gospel Library and the Gospel Living apps. In these inspired resources, we can find the scriptures, teachings of modern prophets, and the *General Handbook*. The Youth tab in the Gospel Library has many resources for quorum and class presidencies²⁶ and has *For the Strength of Youth: A Guide for Making Choices*. As all members of the ward study these inspired sources and seek guidance from the Spirit, everyone will be directed by the Lord in strengthening the youth.

The entire ward will be blessed and strengthened as members focus on the rising generation. Despite our imperfections and shortcomings, Heavenly Father invites each of us, through the companionship of His Spirit, to reach out to others. He knows that we grow and are sanctified as we follow the promptings of the Holy Ghost.²⁷ It doesn’t matter that our efforts are imperfect. When we partner with the Lord, we can trust that our efforts will be in line with what He would do for the youth.

By following the direction of the Holy Ghost in reaching out to the youth, we become witnesses of



As part of the Church's Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square global participant program, these 12 international musicians from 10 nations rejoiced in the opportunity to sing with the choir during the 194th Annual General Conference.

Heavenly Father's love in their lives. Acting on promptings from the Lord builds relationships of love and trust. It is relationships in the lives of the youth that have the greatest influence on their choices.

The youth will learn the pattern of revelation as they participate with us in the process of seeking and acting upon promptings to serve others. As the youth turn to the Lord for this inspired guidance, their relationships with and trust in Him will deepen.

We express our confidence in the youth by offering support and direction without taking over.²⁸ As we step back and allow the youth to learn through counseling together, choosing an inspired course, and putting their plan into action, they will experience true joy and growth.

President Henry B. Eyring taught that "what will matter most is what they learn from [you] about who they really are and what they can really become. My guess is that they won't

learn it so much from lectures. They will get it from feelings of who you are, who you think they are, and what you think they might become."²⁹

Our youth amaze us with their courage, their faith, and their abilities. As they choose to be fully engaged disciples of Jesus Christ, His gospel will be etched upon their hearts. Following Him will become a part of who they are, not just what they do.

Helaman helped the young Ammonites to see how a valiant disciple of Jesus Christ lives. We can be powerful examples to the youth of how disciples of Christ live today. Faithful parents are praying for these examples in the lives of their children. No program can replace the influence of loving, covenant-keeping adults.

As the president of the priests quorum, the bishop can set an example for the youth of how to be a loyal husband and a loving father³⁰ through protecting, providing, and presiding³¹ in righteous ways. Bishops, with a

"laser-like focus on [the] youth,"³² will have an influence that will last for generations.

The youth today are among Heavenly Father's most noble³³ spirits. They were among the stalwart defenders of truth and agency in the premortal world.³⁴ They were born in these days to gather Israel through their powerful witness of the Lord Jesus Christ. He knows each one of them and knows their great potential. He is patient as they grow. He will redeem and protect them. He will heal and guide them. He will inspire them. We, their parents and leaders, have been prepared to support them. We have the Savior's Church to assist us as we raise the next generation.

I bear witness that Christ's Church, restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith and led today by President Russell M. Nelson, is organized to help the youth fulfill their great purpose in these latter days. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Alma 53:19.
2. “If you choose to, if you want to, . . . you can be a big part of something big, something grand, something majestic! . . . You are among the best the Lord has ever sent to this world. You have the capacity to be smarter and wiser and have more impact on the world than any previous generation!” (Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel” [worldwide youth devotional, June 3, 2018], Gospel Library).
3. Dale G. Renlund, “Through God’s Eyes,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2015, 94.
4. Alma 56:55.
5. Alma 56:43–44.
6. Alma 56:46.
7. “Our Heavenly Father’s goal in parenting is not to have His children *do* what is right; it is to have His children *choose* to do what is right” (Dale G. Renlund, “Choose You This Day,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 104).
8. “As we empower the youth by inviting and allowing them to act, the Church will move forward in miraculous ways” (from a meeting with Elder David A. Bednar; see also 2020 Temple and Family History Leadership Instruction, Feb. 27, 2020, Gospel Library).
9. Alma 53:22.
10. Alma 56:17.
11. Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel,” Gospel Library.

12. Alma 53:20.
13. Alma 58:12.
14. Alma 56:30.
15. *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7.1.2, Gospel Library.
16. See *General Handbook*, 6.7.2.
17. Alma 23:7.
18. Alma 58:37.
19. Alma 58:10–11.
20. Alma 57:26.
21. Alma 53:21.
22. Alma 56:47.
23. See Alma 23:7; 24:17–19.
24. Alma 56:27.
25. See *General Handbook*, 7.1.1.
26. “As we seek eternal truth, the following two questions can help us recognize whether a concept comes from God or from another source: Is the concept taught consistently in the scriptures and by living prophets? Is the concept confirmed by the witness of the Holy Ghost? God reveals doctrinal truths through prophets, and the Holy Ghost confirms those truths to us and helps us apply them” (John C. Pingree Jr., “Eternal Truth,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2023, 100).
27. See Doctrine and Covenants 4:2–4.
28. “If [our] youth are too underwhelmed [by God’s work], they are more likely to be overwhelmed by the world. . . . How many deacons and teachers quorum presidencies consist of merely calling on someone

- to offer a prayer or pass the sacrament? Brethren, these really are special spirits, and they can do things of significance if given a chance!” (Neal A. Maxwell, “Unto the Rising Generation,” *Ensign*, Apr. 1985, 11).
29. Henry B. Eyring, “Teaching Is a Moral Act” (address given at the Brigham Young University annual conference, Aug. 27, 1991), 3, speeches.byu.edu.
30. See “Aaronic Priesthood Quorum Theme,” Gospel Library.
31. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Gospel Library.
32. “It is our hope that bishoprics will give great emphasis and focus to the priesthood responsibilities of young men and help them in their quorum duties. Capable adult Young Men advisers will be called to assist the Aaronic Priesthood quorum presidencies and the bishopric in their duties. We are confident that more young men and young women will rise to the challenge and stay on the covenant path because of this laser-like focus on our youth” (Quentin L. Cook, “Adjustments to Strengthen Youth,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2019, 41).
33. “Our Heavenly Father has reserved many of His most noble spirits—perhaps, I might say, His finest team—for this final phase. Those noble spirits—those finest players, those heroes—are *you!*” (Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel,” Gospel Library).
34. “The teenager you love may well have been one of the valiant warriors on the side of agency and truth. . . . We can help in the way we react to their determination to choose for themselves. They will sense whether we see them as if they could well have been one of the faithful warriors from the premortal existence, committed still to the defense of moral agency and aware of its great value to bring them happiness. If we can see them as faithful warriors from the premortal existence, we may also see their claims of independence as a sign of their potential, a sign that they are testing the power of agency that will bring them happiness” (Henry B. Eyring, “A Life Founded in Light and Truth” [Brigham Young University devotional, Aug. 15, 2000], 3, 4, speeches.byu.edu).



Brazil



By Elder Quentin L. Cook
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Be One with Christ

We are united by our love of and faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement. The essence of truly belonging is to be one with Christ.

I have felt deeply about the Atonement of Jesus Christ since I was quite young, but the reality of the Savior's Atonement came home to me when I was 25. I had just graduated from Stanford Law School and was studying for the California bar exam. My mother called and said that my grandfather Crozier Kimball, who lived in Utah, was dying. She said if I wanted to see him, I had better come home. My grandfather was 86 and very ill. I had a wonderful visit. He was so pleased to see me and share his testimony with me.

When Crozier was just three years old, his father, David Patten Kimball, died at age 44.¹ Crozier hoped that his father and his grandfather Heber C. Kimball would approve of his life and feel he had been true to his heritage.

My grandfather's primary counsel to me was to avoid any sense of entitlement or privilege because of these faithful ancestors. He told me my focus should be on the Savior and the Savior's Atonement. He said we are all children of a loving Heavenly Father. Regardless of who our earthly ancestors are, each of us will report to the Savior on how well we kept His commandments.

Grandpa referred to the Savior as the "Keeper of the Gate," a reference to 2 Nephi 9:41. He told me he hoped

he had been sufficiently repentant to qualify for the Savior's mercy.²

I was deeply touched. I knew he had been a righteous man. He was a patriarch and served several missions. He taught me that no one can return to God by good works alone without the benefit of the Savior's Atonement. I can remember to this day the great love and appreciation Grandpa had for the Savior and His Atonement.

In 2019 during an assignment in Jerusalem,³ I visited an upper room which may have been near the site where the Savior washed His Apostles' feet prior to His Crucifixion. I was spiritually touched and thought of how He commanded His Apostles to love one another.

I recalled the Savior's pleading Intercessory Prayer in our behalf. This prayer occurred in literally the closing hours of His mortal life as recorded in the Gospel of John.

This prayer was directed to followers of Christ, including all of us.⁴ In the Savior's petition to His Father, He pleaded "that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." The Savior then continues, "And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one."⁵ *Oneness* is what Christ prayed for prior to His betrayal and

Crucifixion. Oneness with Christ and our Heavenly Father can be obtained through the Savior's Atonement.

The Lord's saving mercy is not dependent on lineage, education, economic status, or race. It is based on being one with Christ and His commandments.

The Prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery received the revelation on Church organization and government in 1830, soon after the Church was organized. What is now section 20 was read by the Prophet Joseph at the first Church conference and was the first revelation approved by common consent.⁶

The content of this revelation is truly remarkable. It teaches us the significance and role of the Savior and how to access His power and blessings through His atoning grace. The Prophet Joseph was 24 years old and had already received numerous revelations and completed the translation of the Book of Mormon by the gift and power of God. Both Joseph and Oliver are identified as ordained Apostles, thus having authority to preside over the Church.

Verses 17 through 36 contain a summary of essential Church doctrine, including the reality of God, the Creation of mankind, the Fall, and Heavenly Father's plan of salvation through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Verse 37 contains the essential requirements for baptism into the Lord's Church. Verses 75 through 79 set forth the sacrament prayers we utilize every Sabbath.

The doctrine, principles, sacraments, and practices that the Lord established through Joseph Smith, the Prophet of the Restoration, are truly seminal.⁷

The requirements for baptism, while profound, are uniquely simple.

They primarily include humility before God, a broken heart and contrite spirit,⁸ repenting of all sins, taking upon us the name of Jesus Christ, enduring to the end, and showing by our works that we have received of the Spirit of Christ.⁹

It is significant that all the qualifications for baptism are spiritual. No economic or social attainment is necessary. The poor and the rich have the same spiritual requirements.

There are no race, gender, or ethnicity requirements. The Book of Mormon makes it clear that *all* are invited to partake of the Lord's goodness, "black and white, bond and free, male and female; . . . all are alike unto God."¹⁰ "All men are privileged the one like unto the other, and none are forbidden."¹¹

Given our "likeness" before God, it makes little sense to emphasize

our differences. Some have wrongly encouraged us "to imagine people to be much more different from ourselves and from each other than they actually are. [Some] take real but small differences and magnify them into chasms."¹²

In addition, some have wrongly assumed that because all people are invited to receive His goodness and eternal life, there are no conduct requirements.¹³

However, the scriptures attest that all accountable persons are required to repent of sins and keep His commandments.¹⁴ The Lord makes it clear that all have moral agency and "are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, . . . and hearken unto his great commandments; and be faithful unto his words, and choose eternal life."¹⁵

To receive the blessings of the Savior's Atonement, we must affirmatively exercise our moral agency to choose Christ and obey His commandments.

During my life, the meaning of "agency" and "free will" has been dissected and debated. There have been and continue to be many intellectual arguments on these topics.

On the recent cover of a major university alumni publication, a prominent biologist-professor asserts, "There's no room for free will."¹⁶ Not surprisingly, the professor is quoted in the article as saying, "There's no such thing as God, . . . and there's no free will, . . . and this is a vast, indifferent, empty universe."¹⁷ I could not disagree more strongly.

A fundamental doctrine of our faith is that we do have moral agency,¹⁸ which includes free will.¹⁹



Germany

Agency is the ability to choose and act. It is essential to the plan of salvation. Without moral agency, we could not learn, progress, or choose to be one with Christ. Because of moral agency, we “are free to choose liberty and eternal life.”²⁰ In the premortal Council in Heaven, the Father’s plan included agency as an essential element. Lucifer rebelled and “sought to destroy the agency of man.”²¹ Accordingly, the privilege of having a mortal body was denied to Satan and those who followed him.

Other premortal spirits exercised their agency in following Heavenly Father’s plan. Spirits blessed by birth to this mortal life continue to have agency. We are free to choose and act, but we do not control the consequences. “Choices of good and righteousness lead to happiness, peace, and

eternal life, while choices of sin and evil eventually lead to heartache and misery.”²² As Alma said, “Wickedness never was happiness.”²³

In this extremely competitive world, there is a constant effort to excel. Striving to be the best we can be is a righteous and worthwhile endeavor. It is consistent with the Lord’s doctrine. Efforts to diminish or deprecate others or create barriers to their success are contrary to the Lord’s doctrine. We cannot blame circumstances or others for a decision to act contrary to God’s commandments.

In today’s world, it is easy to focus on material and occupational success. Some lose sight of eternal principles and choices that have eternal significance. We would be wise to follow President Russell M. Nelson’s counsel to “think celestial.”²⁴

The most significant choices can be made by almost everyone regardless of talents, abilities, opportunities, or economic circumstances. An emphasis on putting family choices first is essential. This is clear throughout the scriptures. Think of the account in 1 Nephi where Lehi “departed into the wilderness. And he left his house, and his gold, and his silver, and his precious things, and took nothing with him, save it were his family.”²⁵

As we face the vicissitudes of life, many events occur over which we have little or no control. Health challenges and accidents obviously can fit into this category. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted people who did everything right. For the most important choices, we do have control. Going back to my missionary days, Elder Marion D. Hanks, our mission president, had all of us memorize part of a poem by Ella Wheeler Wilcox:

*There is no chance, no destiny, no fate,
Can circumvent or hinder or control
The firm resolve of a determined soul.*²⁶

On matters of principle, conduct, religious observance, and righteous living, we are in control. Our faith in and worship of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, is a choice that we make.²⁷

Please understand I am not advocating less interest in education or occupation. What I am saying is that when efforts relating to education and occupation are elevated above the family or being one with Christ, the unintended consequences can be significantly adverse.

The clear and simple doctrine set forth in Doctrine and Covenants 20 is touching and compelling as it amplifies and clarifies sacred spiritual concepts. It teaches that salvation comes as Jesus Christ justifies and sanctifies repentant souls because of the Savior’s grace.²⁸ It sets the stage for the preeminent role of His Atonement.

We should strive to include others in our circle of oneness. If we are to follow President Russell M. Nelson’s admonition to gather scattered Israel on both sides of the veil, we need to include others in our circle of oneness. As President Nelson has so beautifully taught: “On every continent and across the isles of the sea, faithful people are being gathered into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Differences in culture, language, gender, race, and nationality fade into insignificance as the faithful enter the covenant path and come unto our beloved Redeemer.”²⁹

We are united by our love of and faith in Jesus Christ and as children of a loving Heavenly Father. The essence of truly belonging is to be one with Christ. The ordinances of baptism and the sacrament set forth in Doctrine





Brazil

and Covenants 20, together with our temple covenants, unite us in special ways and allow us to be one in every eternally significant way and to live in peace and harmony.

I bear my sure and certain witness that Jesus Christ lives, and because of His Atonement, we can be one with Christ. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

- David, at age 17, had helped carry some of the Saints across the ice-filled Sweetwater River when they were stranded on the high plains of Wyoming (see *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, volume 2, *No Unhallowed Hand, 1846–1893* [2020], 237).
- See Moroni 7:27–28.
- The Chief Rabbi of Norway, Rabbi Michael Melchior, and I were the keynote speakers at a Jewish–Latter-day Saint scholars’ dialogue held on June 5, 2019, at the BYU Jerusalem Center in Israel.
- See John 17:20.
- John 17:21–22.
- See “The Conference Minutes and Record Book of Christ’s Church of Latter Day Saints, 1838–1839, 1844” (commonly known as the Far West Record), June 9, 1830, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; Steven C. Harper, *Making Sense of the Doctrine and Covenants* (2008), 75.
- Doctrine and Covenants 20 was the first revelation published in the Church newspaper and was utilized by missionaries with respect to both doctrine and the administration of the ordinances of baptism and the sacrament (see Harper, *Making Sense of the Doctrine and Covenants*, 75).
- See 2 Nephi 2:7.
- See Doctrine and Covenants 20:37.
- 2 Nephi 26:33.
- 2 Nephi 26:28.
- Peter Wood, *Diversity: The Invention of a Concept* (2003), 20.
- Nehor took this position (see Alma 1:4).
- See Doctrine and Covenants 29:49–50.
- 2 Nephi 2:27–28.
- Stanford* (publication of the Stanford Alumni Association), Dec. 2023, cover.
- In Sam Scott, “As If You Had a Choice,” *Stanford*, Dec. 2023, 44. The article identifies the professor as Robert Sapolsky, a Stanford professor of biology, neurology, and neurosurgery and a best-selling author of science books. The article contains opposing views, including from Alfred Mele, a professor of philosophy at Florida State University who headed a large John Templeton Foundation project on free will. He stated, “Scientists most definitely have not proved that free will—even ambitious free will—is an illusion” (in Scott, “As If You Had a Choice,” 46).
- See D. Todd Christofferson, “Moral Agency” (Brigham Young University devotional, Jan. 31, 2006), speeches.byu.edu.
- See Doctrine and Covenants 58:27.
- 2 Nephi 2:27.
- Moses 4:3.
- True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference* (2004), 12.
- Alma 41:10.
- See Russell M. Nelson, “Think Celestial!,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2023, 117–20.
- 1 Nephi 2:4.
- Poetical Works of Ella Wheeler Wilcox* (1917), 129.
- I have always loved the quote shared by Elder Neal A. Maxwell that stated this in a most succinct fashion: “If you have not chosen the kingdom of God first, it will in the end make no difference what you have chosen instead” (attributed to William Law, an 18th-century English clergyman; quoted in Neal A. Maxwell, “Response to a Call,” *Ensign*, May 1974, 112).
- See Doctrine and Covenants 20:29–31. Calvinist theology emphasized justification and sanctification of fallen souls through the grace of Jesus Christ. It taught that once God had predestined a soul for salvation, nothing could change the outcome. Doctrine and Covenants 20 makes a clean break with Calvinism. It reads, “There is a possibility that man may fall from grace and depart from the living God” (see Doctrine and Covenants 20:32–34; Harper, *Making Sense of the Doctrine and Covenants*, 74).
- Russell M. Nelson, “Building Bridges,” *New Era*, Aug. 2018, 6; *Liahona*, Dec. 2018, 51.



By Elder Shayne M. Bowen
Of the Seventy

Miracles, Angels, and Priesthood Power

If you desire the blessings of the priesthood, including miracles and the ministry of angels, walk the path of covenants God has made available.

Many today say that miracles no longer exist, that angels are fictional, and that the heavens are closed. I testify that miracles have not ceased, angels are among us, and the heavens are truly open.

When our Savior, Jesus Christ, was on the earth, He gave priesthood keys to His chief Apostle, Peter.¹ Through these keys, Peter and the other Apostles led the Savior's Church. But when those Apostles died, the keys of the priesthood were taken from the earth.

I testify that the ancient keys of the priesthood have been restored. Peter, James, and John and other ancient prophets appeared as resurrected beings, bestowing upon the Prophet Joseph Smith what the Lord described as "the keys of my kingdom, and a dispensation of the gospel."²

Those same keys have been passed from prophet to prophet until today. The 15 men we sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators use them to lead the Savior's Church. As in ancient times, there is one senior Apostle who holds and is authorized to exercise all priesthood keys. He is President Russell M. Nelson, prophet and President of the restored Church of

Christ in our day: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Through the Savior's Church, we receive the blessings of the priesthood—including the power of God to help us in our lives. Under authorized priesthood keys, we make sacred promises to God and receive sacred ordinances that prepare us to live in His presence. Beginning with baptism and confirmation and then in the temple, we move forward on a

path of covenants that leads us back to Him.

With hands laid on our heads, we also receive priesthood blessings, including direction, comfort, counsel, healing, and the power to follow Jesus Christ. Throughout my life I have been blessed by this great power. As it has been revealed in scripture, we refer to it as the power of the holy Melchizedek Priesthood.³

In my youth I gained a great respect for this power, especially as it was manifest in priesthood blessings. While serving as a young missionary in Chile, my companion and I were arrested and separated. We were never told why. It was a time of great political upheaval. Thousands of people were taken into custody by the military police and never heard from again.

After being interrogated, I sat alone in a jail cell, not knowing if I would ever see my loved ones again. I turned to my Heavenly Father, fervently pleading: "Father, I have always been taught that Thou watcheth over



Fiji

Thy missionaries. Please, Father, I am nothing special, but I have been obedient and I need Thy help tonight.”

The seeds of this help had been planted many years earlier. After my baptism, I was confirmed a member of the Church and given the gift of the Holy Ghost. As I prayed, alone, behind bars, the Holy Ghost immediately came to me and comforted me. He brought to my mind a very special passage from my patriarchal blessing, which is another blessing of the priesthood. In it, God promised me that through my faithfulness I would be able to be sealed in the temple for

time and eternity to a woman full of beauty and virtue and love, that we would become the parents of precious sons and daughters, and that I would be blessed and magnified as a father in Israel.

Those inspired words about my future filled my soul with peace. I knew that they had come from my loving Heavenly Father, who always keeps His promises.⁴ In that moment, I had the assurance that I would be released and live to see those promises fulfilled.

About a year later, Heavenly Father did bless me with a wife who is full of

beauty and virtue and love. Lynette and I were sealed in the temple. We were blessed with three precious sons and four precious daughters. I became a father, all according to God’s promises in the patriarchal blessing I received as a 17-year-old boy.

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren [and sisters], have miracles ceased because Christ hath ascended into heaven? . . .

“ . . . Nay; neither have angels ceased to minister unto the children of men.”⁵

I testify that miracles and ministrations are continually occurring in our lives, often as a direct result of priesthood power. Some priesthood blessings are fulfilled immediately, in ways we can see and understand. Others are unfolding gradually and will not be fully realized in this life. But God keeps all of His promises, always, as illustrated in this account from our family history:

My paternal grandfather, Grant Reese Bowen, was a man of great faith. I vividly remember hearing him recount how he received his own patriarchal blessing. In his journal, he recorded: “The patriarch promised me the gift of healing. He said, ‘The sick shall be healed. Yea, *the dead shall be raised under your hands.*’”

Years later, Grandfather was piling hay when he felt prompted to return to the house. He was met by his father coming toward him. “Grant, your mother has just passed away,” his father said.

I quote again from Grandfather’s journal: “I didn’t stop but went hurrying into the house and out on the front porch where she lay on a cot. I looked at her and could see there was no sign of life left in her. I remembered my patriarchal blessing and the promise that if I were faithful, through my faith



Uruguay



the sick would be healed; and the dead would be raised. I placed my hands on her head, and I told the Lord that if the promise that He had made to me by the patriarch was true, to make it manifest at this time and raise my mother back to life. I promised Him if He would do this, I should never hesitate to do all in my power for the building up of His kingdom. As I prayed, she opened her eyes and said, ‘Grant, raise me up. I have been in the spirit world, but you have called me back. Let this always be a testimony to you and to the rest of my family.’”

President Russell M. Nelson has taught us to seek and expect miracles.⁶ I testify that because the priesthood has been restored, the power and authority of God are upon the earth. Through callings and councils, men and women, young and old, can participate in priesthood work. It is a work of miracles, attended by angels. It is the work of heaven, and it blesses all God’s children.

In 1989, our family of seven was returning from a ward outing. It was

late. Lynette was expecting our sixth child. She felt a strong prompting to fasten her seat belt, which she had forgotten to do. Shortly thereafter we came around a bend in the road; a car crossed the line into our lane. Going about 70 miles (112 km) an hour, I swerved to avoid hitting the oncoming car. Our van rolled, skidded down the highway, and slid off the road, finally coming to a stop, landing with the passenger side in the dirt.

The next thing I remember hearing was Lynette’s voice: “Shayne, we need to get out through your door.” I was hanging in the air by my seat belt. It took a few seconds to get oriented. We started lifting each of the children out of the van through my window, which was now the ceiling of the van. They were crying, wondering what had happened.

We soon realized that our 10-year-old daughter, Emily, was missing. We yelled her name, but there was no response. Ward members, who were also traveling home, were at the scene frantically looking for her. It was so

dark. I looked in the van again with a flashlight and, to my horror, saw Emily’s tiny body trapped under the van. I called out desperately, “We have to lift the van off of Emily.” I grabbed the roof and pulled back. There were only a few others lifting, but the van miraculously flipped onto its wheels, exposing Emily’s lifeless body.

Emily was not breathing. Her face was the color of a purple plum. I said, “We need to give her a blessing.” A dear friend and ward member knelt with me, and by the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood, in the name of Jesus Christ, we commanded her to live. In that moment, Emily took a long raspy breath.

After what seemed like hours, the ambulance finally arrived. Emily was rushed to the hospital. She had a collapsed lung and a severed tendon in her knee. Brain damage was a concern because of the time she was without oxygen. Emily was in a coma for a day and a half. We continued to pray and fast for her. She was blessed with a full recovery. Today, Emily and her husband, Kevin, are the parents of six daughters.

Miraculously, everyone else was able to walk away. The baby Lynette was carrying was Tyson. He too was spared any harm and was born the next February. Eight months later, after receiving his earthly body, Tyson returned home to Heavenly Father. He is our guardian angel son. We feel his influence in our family and look forward to being with him again.⁷

Those who lifted the van off of Emily observed that the van seemed to weigh nothing. I knew that heavenly angels had joined with earthly angels to lift the vehicle off of Emily’s body. I also know that Emily was brought back to life by the power of the holy priesthood.



By Elder Steven R. Bangerter
Of the Seventy

Foreordained to Serve

Our Heavenly Father desires to reveal to you your personal foreordination, and He will do so as you seek to learn and follow His will.

The Lord revealed this truth to His servants: “I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up.”⁸

I testify that “the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God”⁹—the Melchizedek Priesthood—with its keys, authority, and power has been restored to the earth in these latter days. I know that while not all circumstances turn out like we may hope and pray for, God’s miracles will always come according to His will, His timing, and His plan for us.

If you desire the blessings of the priesthood, including miracles and the ministry of angels, I invite you to walk the path of covenants God has made available to each of us. Members and leaders of the Church who love you will help you take the next step.

I testify that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, lives and leads His Church through living prophets who hold and exercise priesthood keys. The Holy Ghost is real. The Savior gave His life to heal us, reclaim us, and bring us home.

I witness that miracles have not ceased, angels are among us, and the heavens are open. And oh, how open they are! In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See Matthew 16:17–19; Doctrine and Covenants 13; 110; 128:18, 21.
2. See Doctrine and Covenants 27:12–13.
3. See Doctrine and Covenants 107:1–4.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 82:10.
5. Moroni 7:27, 29.
6. See Russell M. Nelson, “The Power of Spiritual Momentum,” *Liahona*, May 2022, 99–100.
7. See Shayne M. Bowen, “Because I Live, Ye Shall Live Also,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2012, 16.
8. Doctrine and Covenants 84:88.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 107:3.

This evening, I speak to the youth of the Church, the rising generation of young men and young women who are the standard bearers for the next generation.

In October 2013, our beloved prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, declared: “Your Heavenly Father has known you for a very long time. You, as His son or daughter, were chosen by Him to come to earth at this precise time, to be a leader in His great work on earth.”¹

Two years ago, President Nelson continued:

“Today I reaffirm strongly that the Lord has asked *every* worthy, able young man to prepare for and serve a mission. For Latter-day Saint young men, missionary service is a priesthood responsibility. You young men have been reserved for this time when the promised gathering of Israel is taking place. . . .

“For you young and able sisters, a mission is also a powerful, but *optional*, opportunity. . . . Pray to know if the Lord would have you serve a mission, and the Holy Ghost will respond to your heart and mind.”²

Our prophet’s references to the Lord holding the youth of our day in reserve for this time in the gathering of Israel and his invitation to pray to know what the Lord would have you

do are, in part, references to the life you lived and blessings you received from God before you were born on this earth.³ All of us who are born on this earth first lived with our Heavenly Father as His spirit children.⁴ The Lord declared to Moses, “I, the Lord God, created all things . . . spiritually, before they were naturally upon the face of the earth.”⁵

When He created you spiritually, He loved you as His spirit sons and daughters and embedded within each of you a divine nature and eternal destiny.⁶

During your premortal life, you “developed [your] identity and increased [your] spiritual capabilities.”⁷ You were blessed with the gift of agency, the ability to make choices for yourself, and you did make important decisions, such as the decision to follow Heavenly Father’s plan of happiness, which is to “obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress . . . and ultimately realize [your] divine destiny as heirs of eternal life.”⁸ This decision affected your life then, in your premortal life, and it continues to affect your life now.⁹ As a child of God living in your premortal life, you “grew in intelligence and learned to love the truth.”¹⁰

Before you were born, God appointed each of you to fulfill



specific missions during your mortal life upon the earth.¹¹ If you remain worthy, the blessings of that pre-mortal decree will enable you to have all kinds of opportunities in this life, including opportunities to serve in the Church and to participate in the most important work happening on the earth today: the gathering of Israel.¹² Those premortal promises and blessings are called your foreordination. “The doctrine of foreordination applies to all members of the Church.”¹³ Foreordination does not guarantee that you will receive certain callings or responsibilities. These blessings and opportunities come in this life as a result of your righteous exercise of agency, just as your foreordination in your premortal life came as a result of righteousness.¹⁴ As you prove yourself worthy and progress along the covenant path, you will receive opportunities to serve in your Young Women class or priesthood quorum. You will be blessed to serve

in the temple, to become a ministering brother or sister, and to serve a mission as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Why does it matter to seek to know and understand your foreordination? In a day when questions abound, when so many seek to know their true identity, the fact that God knows and has blessed each one of us individually before we were ever born on this earth with “essential characteristic[s] of . . . premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose” brings sweet peace and assurance to our mind and heart.¹⁵ Knowing who you are begins with understanding God’s foreordained blessings bestowed upon you before you were ever born on this earth. Our Heavenly Father desires to reveal to you your personal foreordination, and He will do so as you seek to learn and follow His will.¹⁶

I love to read President Nelson’s Instagram posts. One of my favorites was on July 20, 2022. He wrote:

“I believe that if the Lord were

speaking to you directly, the first thing He would make sure you understand is your true identity. My dear friends, you are literally spirit children of God. . . .

“ . . . Make no mistake about it: Your potential is divine. With your diligent seeking, God will give you glimpses of who you may become.”¹⁷

May I share with you how my earthly father taught me to discover my identity and God’s plan in my life?

One Saturday morning when I was 13 years old, I was mowing the grass as part of my weekly chores. When I finished, I heard the door close at the back of our house and looked to see my father calling me to join him. I walked to the back porch, and he invited me to sit with him on the steps. It was a beautiful morning. I still recall him sitting so close to me that our shoulders were touching. He began by telling me he loved me. He asked me what my goals were in life. I thought, “Well, that’s easy.” I knew two things for sure: I wanted to be taller, and I wanted to go camping more often. I was a simple soul. He smiled, paused for a moment, and said: “Steve, I’d like to share something with you that’s very important to me. I’ve prayed that our Heavenly Father will cause what I say now to be indelibly imprinted in your mind and on your soul so that you’ll never forget.”

My father had my full attention in that moment. He turned and looked at me in the eyes and said, “Son, protect the private times of your life.” There was a long pause as he let the meaning sink deep into my heart.

He then continued, “You know, those times when you’re the only one around and no one else knows what you’re doing? Those times when you think, ‘Whatever I do now doesn’t affect anyone else, only me?’”

Then he said, “More than any other time in your life, what you do during the private times of your life will have the greatest impact on how you confront challenges and heartache you will face; and what you do during the private times of your life will also have a greater impact on how you confront the successes and joy you will experience than any other time in your life.”

My father received the wish of his heart. The sound and cadence of his voice, and the love I felt in his words, were indelibly imprinted in my mind and on my soul that day.

I have learned over the years that the greatest miracle of that day on the steps of my childhood home was that, in the private times of my life, I could go to God in prayer to receive revelation. My father was teaching me how I could learn of God’s foreordained blessings. In those private moments, I learned the Book of Mormon is the word of God. I learned God had foreordained me to serve a mission. I learned that God knows me and hears and answers my prayers. I learned that Jesus is the Christ, our Savior and Redeemer.

Though I have made many mistakes since that memorable day with my father, striving to protect the private times of my life has remained an anchor amid the storms of life and has enabled me to seek safe haven and the healing, strengthening blessings of our Savior’s love and atoning sacrifice.

My young brothers and sisters, as you protect the private times of your life with wholesome recreation; listening to uplifting music; reading the scriptures; having regular, meaningful prayer; and making efforts to receive and ponder your patriarchal blessing, you will receive revelation. In President Nelson’s words, your eyes



Fiji

will become “wide open to the truth that this life really *is* the time when you get to decide what kind of life *you* want to live forever.”¹⁸

Our Father in Heaven will answer your prayers, especially your prayers offered during the private times of your life. He will reveal to you your foreordained gifts and talents, and you will feel His love envelop you, if you will sincerely ask and genuinely desire to know. As you protect

the private times of your life, your participation in the ordinances and covenants of the gospel will be more meaningful. You will more fully bind yourself to God in the covenants you make with Him, and you will be lifted to have greater hope, faith, and assurance in the promises He has made to you. Do you want to know God’s plan for you? I bear witness He wants you to know, and He inspired His prophet to the world to invite each of us to



By Sister Andrea Muñoz Spannaus
 Second Counselor in the Young Women General Presidency

pray and receive this eye-opening experience for ourselves.¹⁹ I bear witness to the reality and power of our Savior’s atoning sacrifice that makes it possible to live up to and enjoy all of God’s foreordained blessings, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, “Decisions for Eternity,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2013, 107.
2. Russell M. Nelson, “Preaching the Gospel of Peace,” *Liahona*, May 2022, 6.
3. See Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel” (worldwide youth devotional, June 3, 2018), Gospel Library; “Our Heavenly Father has reserved many of His most noble spirits—perhaps, I might say, His finest team—for this final phase. Those noble spirits—those finest players, those heroes—are *you!*”
4. See Jeremiah 1:5.
5. Moses 3:5.
6. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Gospel Library; “Young Women Theme,” Gospel Library; “Aaronic Priesthood Quorum Theme,” Gospel Library.
7. Topics and Questions, “Premortal Life: Overview,” Gospel Library.
8. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Gospel Library.
9. See Alma 13:1–4.
10. Topics and Questions, “Premortal Life: Overview,” Gospel Library; see also Doctrine and Covenants 138:55–56.
11. See Topics and Questions, “Foreordination,” Gospel Library.
12. See Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel.”
13. Topics and Questions, “Foreordination,” Gospel Library; see also Jeremiah 1:5; “What Is the Relationship between Foreordination and Agency?,” *Liahona*, Oct. 2023, 47; Guide to the Scriptures, “Foreordination,” Gospel Library.
14. See Alma 13:1–4; Doctrine and Covenants 130:20–21.
15. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Gospel Library.
16. See Jeremiah 1:5.
17. Russell M. Nelson, Instagram, July 20, 2022, [Instagram.com/russellmnelson](https://www.instagram.com/russellmnelson).
18. Russell M. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity” (worldwide devotional for young adults, May 15, 2022), Gospel Library.
19. See Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2018, 93–96.

Faithful to the End

By His hand, you will be able to bring down every Goliath that appears in your life.

Dear young friends, today I would like to speak directly to you—the youth of the Church.

It’s been a year since our Young Women General Presidency was called. How much has happened in this past year!

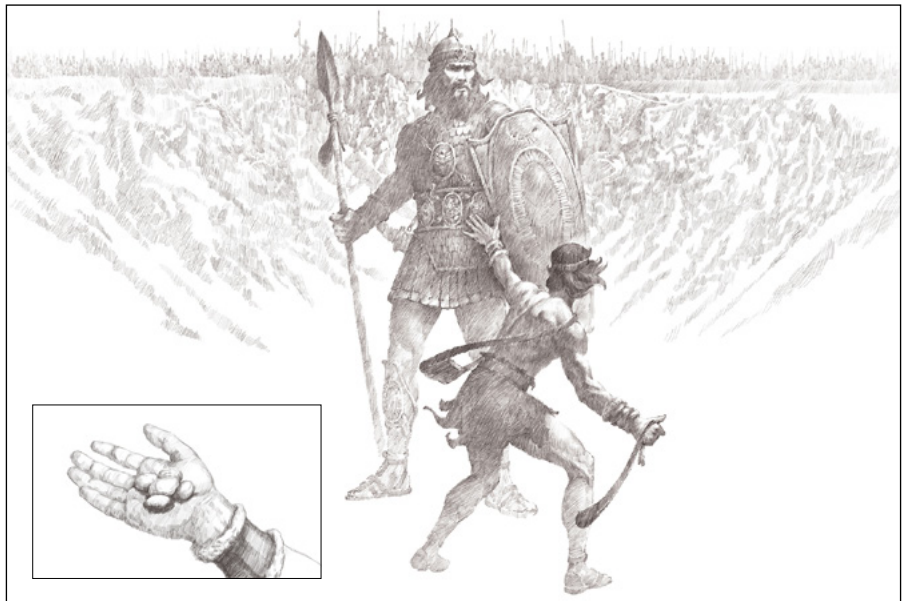
We have met many of you and have studied the teachings of Christ together. We have sung songs, made new friends, and served with you in our communities. We have been strengthened by listening to your testimonies at youth conferences and world events. And we have

worshipped together in the house of the Lord.

Each time, we have shared a message from our Lord Jesus Christ. Tonight will not be different; I have a message for you, the youth of the Church of Jesus Christ.

The Big Questions

Have you ever wondered how you can be faithful to God while living in a world of sin? Where do you get the strength to go forward and continue doing good? How do you experience true joy?



While David used only one stone to kill Goliath, he was prepared with five. This makes me think about how I can prepare myself to face the world.

I think the experience of David and Goliath¹ can help.

David and Goliath

In the Old Testament, the army of the Philistines was battling the Israelites, and every morning and every evening, a giant Philistine named Goliath challenged any Israelite to fight him.

Among the Israelite people lived David, a young shepherd much smaller than Goliath but with a giant faith in Jesus Christ! David volunteered to fight. Even the king tried to dissuade him, but David chose to put his trust in Jesus Christ.

Previously, David had fought a lion and also a bear. From his own experience, he knew that God had protected him and made him victorious. To David, the *cause of God was the most important cause*. So, full of faith in a God who would not abandon him, he gathered five smooth stones, took up his sling, and went to face the giant.

The scriptures tell us that the first stone David threw hit Goliath's forehead, ending his life.²

Searching for the Answer

While David used only one stone to kill Goliath, he was prepared with five. With five! This makes me think about how I can prepare myself to face the world.

What if each of David's stones represented a strength we need to be triumphant in our lives? What could those five stones be? I thought of these possibilities:

1. The stone of *my love for God*.
2. The stone of *my faith in our Savior, Jesus Christ*.
3. The stone of *the knowledge of my true identity*.
4. The stone of *my daily repentance*.

5. The stone of *my access to God's power*.

Let's talk about how we are blessed by these strengths.

First, the stone of *my love for God*.

Loving God is the first great commandment.³ The *For the Strength of Youth* guide teaches us: "God loves you. He is your Father. His perfect love can inspire you to love Him. When your love for Heavenly Father is the most important influence in your life, many decisions become easier."⁴

Our love for God and our close relationship with Him give us the strength we need to transform our hearts and more easily overcome our challenges.

Second, the stone of *my faith in our Savior, Jesus Christ*. When Jesus Christ came to earth, He suffered for our sins,⁵ and He took upon Himself our sorrows, our pains, our weaknesses, and our physical and mental illnesses. That's why He knows how to help us. Having faith in Jesus Christ means to fully trust His wisdom, His timing, His love, and His power to atone for our sins. The stone of faith in Jesus Christ

will defeat any "giant" in our lives.⁶ We can overcome this fallen world because He overcame it first.⁷

Number three, the stone of *the knowledge of my true identity*. Our beloved prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, taught us that our most important identities are as children of God, children of the covenant, and disciples of Jesus Christ.⁸

Everything changes when I know who I really am.⁹ When I doubt my abilities, I often repeat to myself in my mind or out loud, "I am a daughter of God, I am a daughter of God," as many times as I need until I again feel confident to keep going.

Fourth, the stone of *my daily repentance*. In the *For the Strength of Youth* guide, we read: "Repentance isn't punishment for sin; it is the way the Savior frees us from sin. To repent means to change—to turn away from sin and toward God. It means to improve and receive forgiveness. This kind of change is not a one-time event; it's an ongoing process."¹⁰

Nothing is more liberating than feeling God's forgiveness and knowing that we are clean and reconciled





New Zealand

with Him. Forgiveness is possible for everyone.

The fifth stone is the stone of *my access to God's power*. The covenants we make with God, such as those we make in the ordinance of baptism, give us access to the power of godliness.¹¹ God's power is a real power that helps us face challenges, make good decisions, and increase our capacity to endure difficult situations. It is a power with which we can grow in the specific abilities that we need.¹²

The *For the Strength of Youth* guide explains: "Covenants *connect* you to Heavenly Father and the Savior. They *increase God's power* in your life."¹³

Let's talk about that connection. Remember when Christ taught the difference between a house built on rock and one on sand?¹⁴ Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf explained: "A house doesn't survive in a storm because the house is strong. It also doesn't survive just because the rock is strong. The house survives the storm because it is firmly attached to that strong rock. It's the strength of the *connection* to the rock that matters."¹⁵

Our personal connection to Jesus Christ will give us the courage and confidence to move forward amid people who do not respect our beliefs or who bully us. Christ invites us to keep Him in our thoughts constantly; He tells us, "Look unto me in *every* thought."¹⁶ Thinking about the Savior gives us clarity of mind to make decisions, to act without fear, and to say no to what is contrary to God's teachings.¹⁷ When my day is difficult and I feel like I can't take any more, thinking about Christ brings me peace and gives me hope.

How can we draw upon this power of Jesus Christ? Obeying our covenants and increasing our faith in Jesus Christ are key.

I actually wish David had had one more stone; that would be the stone of *my testimony*. Our testimony is built by personal spiritual experiences in which we recognize the divine influence in our lives.¹⁸ No one can take that knowledge from us. Knowing what we know from having lived our spiritual experiences is priceless. Being true to that knowledge gives us

freedom. It gives us joy! If we love the truth, we will seek it, and once we find it, we will defend it.¹⁹

An Invitation

Just as I chose stone number six, I invite you to meet with your class, quorum, or family and think about what other strengths you need to acquire to remain faithful to God and, therefore, overcome the world.

A Promise

Dear friends, Christ is eager to accompany us on the journey of our lives. I promise you, as you hold on to the iron rod, you will walk hand in hand with Jesus Christ.²⁰ *He* will be guiding you, and *He* will be teaching you.²¹ By *His* hand, you will be able to bring down every Goliath that appears in your life.

Testimony

I testify that there is joy in praying every day, in reading the Book of Mormon every day, in partaking of the sacrament every Sunday, and in going to seminary—even in the early morning! There is joy in doing good.

There is joy in being faithful to the God of the universe, the Savior of the world, the King of kings. There is joy in being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

God is our Father. He knows your heart's desires and your possibilities, and He trusts you.

Dear youth, Jesus Christ will help you to be faithful to the end. Of these truths I bear my testimony in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See 1 Samuel 17.
2. See 1 Samuel 17:40, 45–49.
3. See Matthew 22:36–38.
4. *For the Strength of Youth: A Guide for Making Choices* (2022), 11.
5. See Alma 7:11–14.
6. See 1 Nephi 7:12.



By Elder Matthew L. Carpenter
Of the Seventy

Fruit That Remains

Having the Holy Ghost seal our ordinances is essential if we want to have the promised blessings for all eternity.

7. See Russell M. Nelson, “Overcome the World and Find Rest,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2022, 95–98.
8. See Russell M. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity” (worldwide devotional for young adults, May 15, 2022), Gospel Library.
9. See “Young Women Theme” and “Aaronic Priesthood Quorum Theme,” Gospel Library.
10. *For the Strength of Youth*, 7.
11. See Russell M. Nelson, “The Power of Spiritual Momentum,” *Liahona*, May 2022, 97–100; see also Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–21.
12. See *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 3.5, Gospel Library.
13. *For the Strength of Youth*, 34; emphasis added.
14. See 3 Nephi 14:24–27.
15. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “*For the Strength of Youth: The Savior’s Message to You*,” *For the Strength of Youth*, Mar. 2024, 38.
16. Doctrine and Covenants 6:36; emphasis added.
17. See Doctrine and Covenants 6:33–34.
18. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Testimony,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2008, 26–29; see also Alma 5:46.
19. See *For the Strength of Youth*, 32: “Love the truth so much that you would never want to steal, lie, cheat, or deceive in any way—at school, at work, online, everywhere. Be the same faithful follower of Jesus Christ in public and in private.”
20. See 1 Nephi 8:19, 30; 15:24–25; Helaman 3:29–30.
21. See 3 Nephi 22:13.



As a young boy, I loved fresh, ripe peaches. To this day, the idea of biting into a juicy, ripe peach with its tangy flavor makes my mouth water. When fully matured peaches are picked, they last two to four days before they spoil. I have fond memories of joining with my mother and my siblings in our kitchen as we would preserve harvested peaches for the coming winter by sealing them in bottles. If we preserved the peaches correctly, this delicious fruit would last several years, not just two to four days. If properly prepared and heated, the fruit is preserved until the seal is broken.

Christ directed us to “go and bring forth fruit, . . . that your fruit should remain.”¹ But He wasn’t speaking about peaches. He was talking about God’s blessings to His children. If we make and keep covenants with God, the blessings associated with our covenants can extend beyond this life and be sealed upon us, or preserved, forever, becoming fruit that remains for all eternity.

The Holy Ghost, in His divine role as the Holy Spirit of Promise, will seal each ordinance upon those who are faithful to their covenants so that it will be valid after mortality.² Having the Holy Ghost seal our ordinances is essential if we want to have the

promised blessings for all eternity, becoming fruit that remains.

This is particularly important if we want to be exalted.³ As President Russell M. Nelson has taught, we should “begin with the end in mind. . . . Surely, for each of us, the ‘end’ we would most like to achieve is to live forever with our families in an exalted state where we will be in the presence of God, our Heavenly Father, and His Son Jesus Christ.”⁴ President Nelson has also said: “Celestial marriage is a pivotal part of preparation for eternal life. It requires one to be married to the right person, in the right place, by the right authority, and to obey that sacred covenant faithfully. Then one may be assured of exaltation in the celestial kingdom of God.”⁵

What are the blessings of exaltation? They include dwelling in God’s presence for eternity together as husband and wife, inheriting “thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, . . . and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever,”⁶ receiving all that God the Father has.⁷

The Lord revealed through Joseph Smith:

“In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees;
“And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of



Philippines

the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage];

“And if he does not, he cannot obtain it.

“He may enter into the other, but that is the end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase.”⁸

We learn here that one can be in the celestial kingdom, or dwell in the presence of God, and be single. But to be exalted in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom, one must enter into marriage by the proper authority and then be true to the covenants made in that marriage. As we are faithful to these covenants, the Holy Spirit of Promise can seal our marriage covenant.⁹ Such sealed blessings become fruit that remains.

What is required to faithfully keep the new and everlasting covenant of marriage?

President Russell M. Nelson has taught there are two types of bonds when we enter into this eternal marriage covenant: a lateral bond between husband and wife, and a vertical bond with God.¹⁰ To have the blessings of exaltation sealed upon us

and remain after this life, we must be true to both the lateral and the vertical bonds of the covenant.

To keep the lateral bond with your spouse, God has counseled us to “love [your] wife [or husband] with all [your] heart, and . . . cleave unto her [or him] and none else.”¹¹ For those who are married, to cleave unto her or him and none else means you counsel together in love, you love and care for each other, you prioritize time with your spouse over outside interests, and you call upon God to help you overcome your weaknesses.¹² It also means there is no emotional intimacy or sexual relations of any kind outside of your marriage, including flirting or dating, and there is no pornography, which engenders lust.¹³

To keep the lateral bond in the covenant, each partner must desire to be in the marriage. President Dallin H. Oaks recently taught: “We also know that He [God] will force no one into a sealing relationship against his or her will. The blessings of a sealed relationship are assured for all who keep their covenants *but never by forcing a sealed*

*relationship on another person who is unworthy or unwilling.”*¹⁴

What is the vertical bond referred to by President Nelson? The vertical bond is one we make with God.

To keep the vertical bond with God, we are true to the temple covenants we have made regarding the laws of obedience, sacrifice, the gospel, chastity, and consecration. We also covenant with God to receive our eternal companion and to be a righteous spouse and parent. As we keep the vertical bond, we qualify for the blessings of being part of the family of God through the Abrahamic covenant, including the blessings of posterity, the gospel, and the priesthood.¹⁵ These blessings are also the fruit that remains.

While we hope that all who enter into the new and everlasting covenant remain true and have the blessings sealed upon them for all eternity, sometimes that ideal seems beyond our reach. Throughout my ministry I have encountered members who make and keep covenants while their spouse does not. There are also those who are single, never having the opportunity to marry in mortality. And there are those who are not faithful in their marriage covenants. What happens to individuals in each of these circumstances?

1. If you remain faithful to the covenants you made when you were endowed, you will receive the personal blessings promised to you in the endowment *even if your spouse has broken his or her covenants or withdrawn from the marriage*. If you were sealed and later divorced, and if your sealing is not canceled, the personal blessings of that sealing remain in effect for you if you remain faithful.¹⁶

Sometimes, due to feelings of betrayal and very real hurt, a faithful spouse may want to cancel their sealing with their unfaithful spouse to get as far away as possible from them, both on earth and for eternity. If you are concerned that you will somehow be tied to an unrepentant former spouse, remember, *you will not!* God will not require anyone to remain in a sealed relationship throughout eternity against his or her will. Heavenly Father will ensure that we will receive every blessing that our desires and choices allow.¹⁷

However, if a cancellation of sealing is desired, agency is respected. Certain procedures can be followed. *But this should not be done casually!* The First Presidency holds the keys to bind on earth and

in heaven. Once a sealing cancellation has been granted by the First Presidency, the blessings related to that sealing are no longer in force; they are canceled both laterally and vertically. It is important to understand that to receive the blessings of exaltation, we must demonstrate that we are willing to enter into and faithfully keep this new and everlasting covenant, either in this life or the next.

2. For those who are single members of the Church, please remember that “in the Lord’s own way and time, no blessings will be withheld from His faithful Saints. The Lord will judge and reward each individual according to heartfelt [desires] as well as deed.”¹⁸
3. If you have not remained faithful to temple covenants, is there hope?

Yes! The gospel of Jesus Christ is a gospel of hope. That hope comes through Jesus Christ with sincere repentance and obediently following Christ’s teachings. I have seen individuals make grave mistakes, breaking sacred covenants. On a regular basis, I see those who sincerely repent, are forgiven, and return to the covenant path. If you have broken your temple covenants, I urge you to turn to Jesus Christ, counsel with your bishop, repent, and open your soul to the *mighty* healing power available because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, our loving Heavenly Father has given us covenants so that we may have access to all that He has in store for us. These



Uruguay



New Zealand

sacred blessings from God are more delicious than any earthly fruit. They can be preserved for us forever, becoming fruit that remains, as we are faithful to our covenants.

I testify that God has restored the authority to bind on earth and in heaven. That authority is found in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is held by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve and is exercised under the direction of President Russell M. Nelson. Those who enter into the new and everlasting covenant of marriage and keep that covenant can become perfected and eventually receive the fulness of the glory of the Father, regardless of circumstances beyond their control.¹⁹

These promised blessings appertaining to our covenants can be sealed upon us by the Holy Spirit of Promise and become fruit that remains forever and ever. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. John 15:16.
2. See Dale G. Renlund, “Accessing God’s Power through Covenants,” *Liahona*, May 2023, 35–38; Doctrine and Covenants 132:7.
3. An ordinance is sealed when it is made valid both in heaven and on earth because it is performed by one having authority and is ratified by the Holy Ghost.
“We tend to think of the sealing authority as applying only to certain temple ordinances, but that authority is necessary to make any ordinance valid and binding beyond death. The sealing power confers a seal of legitimacy upon your baptism, for example, so that it is recognized here and in heaven. Ultimately, all priesthood ordinances are performed

under the keys of the President of the Church, and as President Joseph Fielding Smith explained, ‘He [the President of the Church] has given us authority, he has put the sealing power in our priesthood, because he holds those keys’ [quoted by Harold B. Lee, in Conference Report, Oct. 1944, 75]” (D. Todd Christofferson, “The Sealing Power,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2023, 20).

“An act which is sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise is one which is ratified by the Holy Ghost; it is one which is approved by the Lord. . . . No one can lie to the Holy Ghost and get by undetected. . . . These principles also apply to every other ordinance and performance in the Church. Thus if both parties [in a marriage] are ‘just and true’ [Doctrine and Covenants 76:53], if they are worthy, a ratifying seal is placed on their temple marriage; if they are unworthy, they are not justified by the Spirit and the ratification of the Holy Ghost is withheld. Subsequent worthiness will put the seal in force, and unrighteousness will break any seal” (Bruce R. McConkie, “Holy Spirit of Promise,” in *Preparing for an Eternal Marriage Student Manual* [2003], 136).

“The Holy Spirit of Promise is the Holy Ghost who places the stamp of approval upon every ordinance: baptism, confirmation, ordination, marriage. *The promise is that the blessings will be received through faithfulness.* If a person violates a covenant, whether it be of baptism, ordination, marriage or anything else, the Spirit withdraws the stamp of approval, and the blessings will not be received. Every ordinance is sealed with a promise of a reward based upon faithfulness. The Holy Spirit withdraws the stamp of approval where covenants are broken” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie [1954], 1:45).

4. Russell M. Nelson, *Heart of the Matter: What 100 Years of Living Have Taught Me* (2023), 15. All covenants must be sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise if they are to have force after the resurrection of the dead (see Doctrine and Covenants 132:7).
5. Russell M. Nelson, “Celestial Marriage,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2008, 94.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 132:19.
7. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:38.
8. Doctrine and Covenants 131:1–4.
9. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:19–20.
“That highest destination—exaltation in the celestial kingdom—is the focus of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (Dallin H. Oaks, “Kingdoms of Glory,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2023, 26).
10. “Just as marriages and families share a unique *lateral* bond [which] creates a special love, so does the new relationship

formed when we bind ourselves by covenant *vertically* to . . . God” when we enter into the new and everlasting covenant of marriage (Russell M. Nelson, *Heart of the Matter*, 41–42).

11. Doctrine and Covenants 42:22; see also *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 38.6.16. In discussing marriage here, I am referring to marriage according to God’s law, which defines marriage as the legal and lawful union between a man and a woman (see “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Gospel Library).
12. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Gospel Library.
13. See Doctrine and Covenants 42:22–24.
14. Dallin H. Oaks, “Kingdoms of Glory,” 29; emphasis added.
15. See Doctrine and Covenants 86:8–11; 113:8; Abraham 2:9–11.
16. See *General Handbook*, 38.4.1.

While I was serving a full-time mission in Switzerland, my companion and I shared the gospel with a wonderful 60-year-old Swiss couple. As we taught this couple about the restored Church of Jesus Christ, the woman showed great interest in what we were teaching. Over the next few weeks, she gained a testimony of the reality that the Church of Jesus Christ was restored with correct authority from God and that Jesus Christ directs His Church through living prophets and apostles. We looked forward to teaching this couple about one of the most sublime doctrines of the Restoration, the opportunity for eternal marriage. Surprisingly, however, as we taught this couple about the doctrine of eternal marriage, the Swiss woman remarked that she had no interest in being with her husband for all eternity. To her, heaven did not include being with her husband, to whom she had been married for 36 years. This sister was baptized, but her husband was not. They were never sealed in the temple.

To many, however, heaven would not be heaven without being with the person to whom they are married. To be together with the spouse you love forever truly sounds like heaven. As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland shared about his dear, beloved wife, Pat, heaven would not be heaven without her (see “Scott Taylor: For Elder Holland, Heaven without His Wife and Children ‘Wouldn’t Be Heaven for Me,”” *Church News*, July 22, 2023, thechurchnews.com).

17. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Kingdoms of Glory,” 26.
18. Russell M. Nelson, “Celestial Marriage,” 94.
19. See John 15:16.



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

A Higher Joy

May we all seek and find the higher joy that comes from devoting our lives to our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son.

I have had the great blessing of speaking at general conference for three decades now. During that time, I have been asked questions relating to these messages by many around the world. Lately, one particular question keeps coming up. It usually goes something like this: “Elder Uchtdorf, I listened carefully to your last talk, but . . . I didn’t hear anything about aviation.”

Well, after today, I might not hear that question for a while.

On “the Tumbling Mirth of Sun-Split Clouds”¹

It’s hard to believe it was only 120 years ago when Wilbur and Orville Wright first lifted off and flew over the sands of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. Four short flights on that December day changed the world and opened the door to one of the greatest inventions in the world’s history.

Flying was risky in those early days. The brothers knew this. And so did their father, Milton. In fact, he was so terrified of losing both of his sons in a flying accident that they promised him they would never fly together.

And they never did—with one exception. Seven years after that historic day at Kitty Hawk, Milton Wright finally gave his consent and watched as Wilbur and Orville flew

together for the first time. After landing, Orville convinced his father to take his first and only flight and to see for himself what it was like.

As the plane lifted from the ground, the 82-year-old Milton got so caught up in the exhilaration of flight that all fear left him. Orville rejoiced as his father shouted with delight, “Higher, Orville, higher!”²

This was a man after my own heart!

Perhaps the reason I speak about aviation occasionally is that I know something of what the Wrights felt. I too have “slipped the surly bonds of Earth and danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings.”³

The Wright brothers’ first flight, which happened a mere 37 years before my birth, opened doors of adventure, wonder, and pure joy into my life.

And yet, as amazing as that joy is, there is an even higher kind of joy. Today, in the spirit of Milton Wright’s delighted cry, “Higher, Orville, higher,” I would like to speak about this higher joy—where it comes from, how it enters our hearts, and how we can experience it in greater measure.

The Whole Aim of Human Existence

It probably goes without saying that everyone wants to be happy.⁴ Nevertheless, it also goes without

saying that not everyone is happy. Sadly, it seems that for many people, happiness is hard to find.⁵

Why is that? If happiness is the one thing we humans desire most, why are we so unsuccessful at finding it? To paraphrase a country song, maybe we’ve been looking for joy in all the wrong places.⁶

Where Can We Find Happiness?

Before we discuss how to find joy, allow me to acknowledge that depression and other difficult mental and emotional challenges are real, and the answer is not simply “Try to be happier.” My purpose today is not to diminish or trivialize mental health issues. If you face such challenges, I mourn with you, and I stand beside you. For some people, finding joy may include seeking help from trained mental health professionals who devote their lives to practicing their very important art. We should be thankful for such help.

Life is not an endless sequence of emotional highs. “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things.”⁷ And if God Himself weeps, as the scriptures affirm He does,⁸ then of course you and I will weep as well. Feeling sad is not a sign of failure. In this life, at least, joy and sorrow are inseparable companions.⁹ Like all of you, I have felt my share of disappointment, sorrow, sadness, and remorse.

However, I have also experienced for myself the glorious dawn that fills the soul with joy so profound that it can scarcely be kept in. I have discovered for myself that this peaceful confidence comes from following the Savior and walking in His Way.

The peace He gives us is not like what the world gives.¹⁰ It’s better. It’s higher and holier. Jesus said, “I am

come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”¹¹

The gospel of Jesus Christ is truly the “good news of great joy!”¹² It is a message of matchless hope! A message of yoke-bearing and burden-lifting.¹³ Of light-gathering. Of heavenly favor, higher understanding, holier covenants, eternal security, and everlasting glory!

Joy is the very purpose of God’s plan for His children. It’s what you were created for—“that [you] might have joy!”¹⁴ You were built for this!

Our Father in Heaven has not hidden the path to happiness. It is not a secret. It is available to all!¹⁵

It is promised to those who walk the path of discipleship, follow the

teachings and example of the Savior, keep His commandments, and honor covenants they make with God. What a remarkable promise!

God Has Something More to Offer

We all know people who say that they don’t need God to be happy, that they are happy enough without religion.

I acknowledge and respect these feelings. Our beloved Father in Heaven wants all His children to have as much happiness as possible, so He has filled this world with beautiful, wholesome pleasures and delights, “both to please the eye and . . . gladden the heart.”¹⁶ For me, flying brought great happiness. Others

find it in music, in art, in hobbies, or in nature.

By inviting everyone and sharing the Savior’s good news of great joy, we do not discount any of these sources of joy. We’re simply saying that God has something more to give. A higher and more profound joy—a joy that transcends anything this world offers. It is a joy that endures heartbreak, penetrates sorrow, and diminishes loneliness.

Worldly happiness, by contrast, does not last. It cannot. It is the nature of all earthly things to grow old, decay, wear out, or become stale. But godly joy is eternal, because God is eternal. Jesus Christ came to lift us out of the temporal and replace corruption with



Fiji



incorruption. Only He has that power, and only His joy is perpetual.

If you feel there could be more of this kind of joy in your life, I invite you to embark on the journey of following Jesus Christ and His Way. It is a journey of a lifetime—and beyond. Please let me suggest a few beginning steps on this worthy journey of discovering pure joy.

Draw Near unto God¹⁷

Do you remember the woman in the New Testament who endured a bleeding illness for 12 years?¹⁸ She had spent all she had on physicians, but things only grew worse. She had heard of Jesus; His power to heal was well known. But could He heal her? And how could she even get near Him? Her sickness made her “unclean” according to the law of Moses, and therefore she was required to stay away from others.¹⁹

Approaching Him openly and asking for healing seemed out of the question.

Still, she thought, “If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole.”²⁰

At last, her faith overcame her fear. She braved the censure of others and pressed toward the Savior.

Finally, she was within reach. She extended her hand.

And she was healed.

Aren’t we all somewhat like this woman?

There may be many reasons why we hesitate to draw near to the Savior. We may face ridicule or condemnation by others. In our pride, we may dismiss the possibility of something so simple being of so much value. We may think that our condition somehow disqualifies us from His healing—that the distance is too great or our sins too many.

Like this woman, I have learned that if we draw near to God and reach out to touch Him, we can indeed find healing, peace, and joy.

Look for It

Jesus taught, “Seek, and ye shall find.”²¹

I believe this simple phrase is not only a spiritual promise; it is a statement of fact.

If we seek reasons to be angry, to doubt, to be bitter or alone, we will find them too.

However, if we seek joy—if we look for reasons to rejoice and to happily follow the Savior, we will find them.

We rarely find something we are not looking for.

Are you looking for joy?

Seek, and ye shall find.

Bear One Another’s Burdens²²

Jesus taught, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”²³

Can it be that in our search for joy, the best way to find it is to bring joy to others?

Brothers and sisters, you know and I know this is true! Joy is like a barrel of flour or a jar of oil that will never run out.²⁴ True joy multiplies when it is shared.

It doesn’t require something grand or complicated.

We can do simple things.

Like praying for someone with all our heart.

Giving a sincere compliment.

Helping someone feel welcome,

respected, valued, and loved.

Sharing a favorite scripture and what it means to us.

Or even just by listening.

“When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God,”²⁵ and God will repay your kindness generously.²⁶ The joy you give to others will return to you in “good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over.”²⁷



“What Shall We Do Then?”²⁸

During the coming days, weeks, and months, may I invite you to:

- Spend time in a sincere, full-hearted effort to draw near to God.
- Seek diligently for everyday moments of hope, peace, and joy.
- Bring joy to others around you.

My dear brothers and sisters, dear friends, as you search the word of God for a deeper understanding of God’s eternal plan, accept these invitations, and strive to walk in His Way, you will experience “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding,”²⁹ even in the midst of sorrows. You will feel a greater measure of God’s unsurpassable love swelling within your heart. The dawn of celestial light will penetrate the shadows of your trials, and you will begin to taste the unspeakable glories and wonders of the unseen, perfect, heavenly sphere. You will feel your spirit lifting away from the gravity of this world.

And like good Milton Wright, perhaps you will raise your voice in rejoicing and shout, “Higher, Father, higher!”

May we all seek and find the higher joy that comes from devoting our lives to our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son. This is my earnest prayer

and blessing in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. John Gillespie Magee Jr., “High Flight,” poetryfoundation.org.
2. See Christopher Klein, “10 Things You May Not Know about the Wright Brothers,” *History*, Mar. 28, 2023, history.com.
3. Magee, “High Flight.”
4. Twenty-four hundred years ago, Aristotle observed that happiness is the one thing all humans desire most. In his treatise *Nicomachean Ethics*, he taught that the greatest good in life is the thing we pursue as an end itself (as opposed to those things we pursue that are a means to some other end). Happiness, above all else, is just such a thing. “We always desire happiness for its own sake,” he said, “and never as a means to something else” (*The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, trans. J. E. C. Weldon [1902], 13–14).
5. See Harry Enten, “American Happiness Hits Record Lows,” *CNN*, Feb. 2, 2022, cnn.com; Tamara Lush, “Poll: Americans Are the Unhappiest They’ve Been in 50 Years,” *Associated Press*, June 16, 2020, apnews.com; “The Great Gloom: In 2023, Employees Are Unhappier Than Ever. Why?” *BambooHR*, bamboohr.com.
6. See Wanda Mallette, Patti Ryan, and Bob Morrison, “Lookin’ for Love (in All the Wrong Places)” (1980).
7. 2 Nephi 2:11.
8. See John 11:35; Moses 7:28–37.
9. See 2 Nephi 2:11.
10. See John 14:27.
11. John 10:10.
12. Luke 2:10, New Revised Standard Version.
13. See Matthew 11:28–30.
14. 2 Nephi 2:25.
15. If you have any concerns about whether or not your Father in Heaven will accept you and allow you to receive His joy, I invite you to prayerfully read Christ’s parable of the prodigal son (see Luke 15:11–32). In that parable, we learn how our Heavenly Father feels about His children and how He awaits and celebrates our return after we have strayed from Him! From the moment we “come to ourselves” (see verse 17) and begin the journey home, He will see us, for He stands watching and waiting. And what is He waiting for? For us! As we draw near to Him, He will celebrate our return and call us His child.
16. Doctrine and Covenants 59:18. This revelation also explains, “It pleaseth God that he hath given all these things unto man; for unto this end were they made” (verse 20).
17. To those who draw near to God, He gives this grand promise: “I will draw near unto you” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:63; see also James 4:8).
18. See Mark 5:24–34.
19. See Bible Dictionary, “Clean and unclean.”
20. Mark 5:28.
21. Matthew 7:7.
22. By bearing each other’s burdens, we “fulfil the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2; see also Mosiah 18:8).
23. Acts 20:35.
24. See 1 Kings 17:8–16.
25. Mosiah 2:17.
26. In his Epistle to the Romans, Paul states that God “will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: . . . glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good” (Romans 2:6–7, 10).
27. Luke 6:38. Our very salvation and eternal happiness may depend on our compassion and kindness to others (see Matthew 25:31–46).
28. Luke 3:10.
29. Philippians 4:7.



By Elder Ronald A. Rasband
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Words Matter

Words set a tone. They voice our thoughts, feelings, and experiences, for good or bad.

Brothers, sisters, and friends across the world, I am honored to address this vast audience, many of whom are members of our Church and many of whom are friends and new listeners to this conference broadcast. Welcome!

The messages shared from this pulpit are communicated in words. They are given in English and translated into nearly 100 different languages. Always the base is the same. Words. And words matter a lot. Let me say that again. Words matter!

They are the bedrock of how we connect; they represent our beliefs, morals, and perspectives. Sometimes we speak words; other times we listen. Words set a tone. They voice our thoughts, feelings, and experiences, for good or bad.

Unfortunately, words can be thoughtless, hasty, and hurtful. Once said, we cannot take them back. They can wound, punish, cut down, and even lead to destructive actions. They can weigh heavily on us.

On the other hand, words can celebrate victory, be hopeful and encouraging. They can prompt us to rethink, reboot, and redirect our course. Words can open our minds to truth.

That is why, first and foremost, the Lord's words matter.

In the Book of Mormon, the prophet Alma and his people in ancient America encountered endless warfare with those who had

disregarded the word of God, hardened their hearts, and corrupted their culture. The faithful could have fought, but Alma counseled: "And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God."¹

The "word of God" surpasses all other expressions. It has been so since the Creation of the earth when the Lord spoke: "Let there be light: and there was light."²

From the Savior came these assurances in the New Testament: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."³

And this: "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."⁴

And from Mary, the mother of Jesus, came this humble testimony: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word."⁵

Believing and heeding the word of God will draw us closer to Him. President Russell M. Nelson has promised, "If you will study His words, your ability to be more like Him will increase."⁶

Don't we all want to be, as the hymn says, "more blessed and holy—more, Savior, like thee"?⁷

I picture young Joseph Smith on his knees hearing the words of his Father in Heaven: "[Joseph,] This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!"⁸

We "hear Him" in the words of scripture, but do we let them just sit on the page, or do we recognize He is speaking to us? Do we change?



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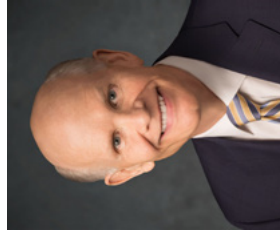
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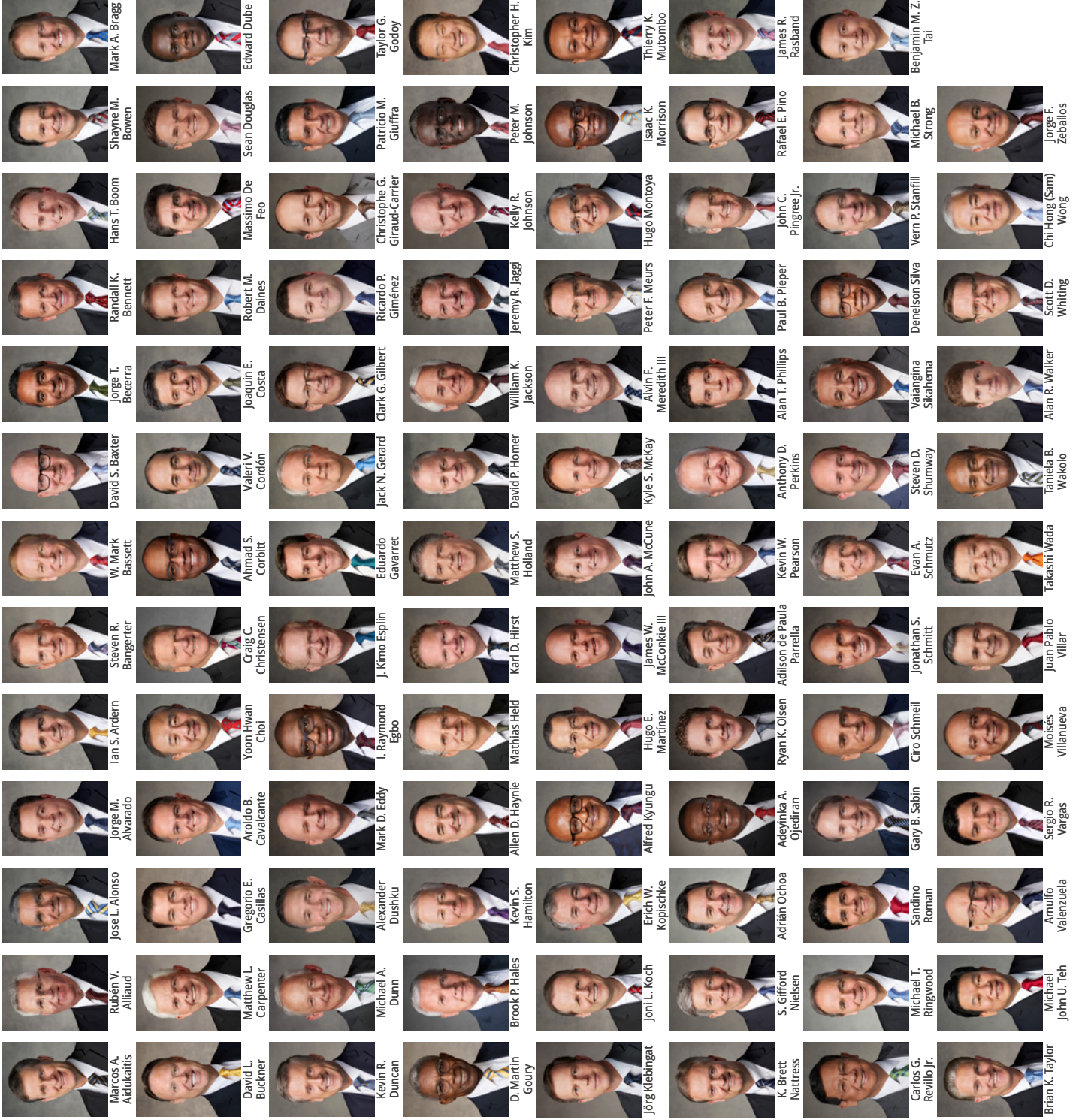
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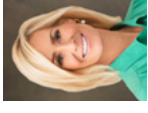


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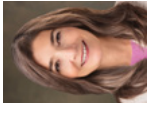
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COME UNTO CHRIST, BY CASEY CHILDS

We “hear Him” in personal revelation and promptings from the Holy Ghost, in answers to prayer, and in those moments when only Jesus Christ, through the power of His Atonement, can lift our burdens, grant us forgiveness and peace, and embrace us “in the arms of his love.”⁹

Second, the words of prophets matter.

Prophets testify of the divinity of Jesus Christ. They teach His gospel and show His love for all.¹⁰ I bear my witness that our living prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, hears and speaks the word of the Lord.

President Nelson has a way with words. He has said, “Keep on the covenant path,”¹¹ “Gather Israel,”¹² “Let God prevail,”¹³ “Build bridges of understanding,”¹⁴ “Give thanks,”¹⁵ “Increase your faith in Jesus Christ,”¹⁶ “Take charge of your testimony,”¹⁷ and “Become a peacemaker.”¹⁸

Most recently, he has asked us to “think celestial.” “When you are confronted with a dilemma,” he said, “think celestial! When tested by temptation, think celestial! When life or loved ones let you down, think celestial! When someone dies prematurely, think celestial. . . . When the pressures of life crowd in upon you, think celestial! . . . As you think celestial, your heart will gradually change, . . . you will view trials and opposition in a new light, . . . [and] your faith will increase.”¹⁹

When we think celestial, we see “things as they really are, and . . . really will be.”²⁰ In this world burdened with confusion and contention, we all need that perspective.

Elder George Albert Smith, long before becoming President of the Church, spoke of sustaining the prophet and heeding his words. He said: “The obligation that we make



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when we raise our hands . . . is a most sacred one. . . . It means . . . that we will stand behind him; we will pray for him; . . . and we will strive to carry out his instructions as the Lord shall direct.”²¹ In other words, we will diligently act upon our prophet’s words.

As one of 15 prophets, seers, and revelators sustained yesterday by our worldwide Church, I want to share with you one of my experiences sustaining the prophet and embracing his words. It was for me much like the prophet Jacob, who recounted, “I had heard the voice of the Lord speaking unto me in very word.”²²

Last October my wife, Melanie, and I were in Bangkok, Thailand, as I was preparing to dedicate what would be the Church’s 185th temple.²³ For me, the assignment was both surreal and humbling. This was the first temple on the Southeast Asia peninsula.²⁴ It was masterfully designed—a six-story,

nine-spired structure, “fitly framed”²⁵ to be a house of the Lord. For months I had contemplated the dedication. What had settled in my soul and mind was that the country and the temple had been cradled in the arms of prophets and apostles. President Thomas S. Monson had announced the temple²⁶ and President Nelson the dedication.²⁷

I had prepared the dedicatory prayer months earlier. Those sacred words had been translated into 12 languages. We were ready. Or so I thought.

The night before the dedication, I was awakened from my sleep with an unsettled, urgent feeling about the dedicatory prayer. I tried to set aside the prompting, thinking the prayer was in place. But the Spirit would not leave me alone. I sensed certain words were missing, and by divine design they came to me in revelation, and

I inserted these words in the prayer near the end: “May we think celestial, letting Thy Spirit prevail in our lives, and strive to be peacemakers always.”²⁸ The Lord was reminding me to heed the words of our living prophet: “Think celestial,” “let the Spirit prevail,” “strive to be peacemakers.” Words of the prophet matter to the Lord and to us.

Third, and so very important, are our own words. Believe me, in our emoji-filled²⁹ world, our words matter.

Our words can be supportive or angry, joyful or mean, compassionate or tossed aside. In the heat of the moment, words can sting and sink painfully deep into the soul—and stay there. Our words on the internet, texting, social media, or tweets take on a life of their own. So be careful what you say and how you say it. In our families, especially with husbands, wives, and children, our words can bring us together or drive a wedge between us.

Let me suggest three simple phrases that we can use to take the sting out of difficulties and differences, lift, and reassure each other:

“Thank you.”

“I am sorry.”

And “I love you.”

Do not save these humble phrases for a special event or catastrophe. Use them often and sincerely, for they show regard for others. Talk is growing cheap; do not follow that pattern.

We can say “thank you” on the elevator, in the parking lot, at the market, in the office, in a queue, or with our neighbors or friends. We can say “I am sorry” when we make a mistake, miss a meeting, forget a birthday, or see someone in pain. We can say “I love you,” and those words carry the message “I am thinking about you,” “I care about you,” “I am



Mexico

here for you,” or “You are everything to me.”

Let me share a personal example. Husbands, take heed. Sisters, this is going to help you too. Before my full-time assignment in the Church, I traveled widely for my company. I was gone a fair amount of time to far reaches of the world. At the end of my day, no matter where I was, I always called home. When my wife, Melanie, picked up the phone and I reported in, our conversation always led us to expressing “I love you.” Every day, those words served as an anchor to my soul and my conduct; they were a protection to me from evil designs. “Melanie, I love you” spoke of the precious trust between us.

President Thomas S. Monson used to say, “There are feet to steady, hands to grasp, minds to encourage, hearts to inspire, and souls to save.”³⁰ Saying “thank you,” “I am sorry,” “I love you” will do just that.

Brothers and sisters, words do matter.

I promise that if we “feast upon the words of Christ”³¹ that lead to salvation, our prophet’s words that guide and encourage us, and our own words that speak of who we are and what we hold dear, the powers of heaven will pour down upon us. “The words

of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.”³² We are Heavenly Father’s children and He is our God, and He expects us to speak with “the tongue of angels”³³ by the power of the Holy Ghost.³⁴

I love the Lord Jesus Christ. He is, in the words of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, “Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”³⁵ And as the Apostle John made clear, Jesus Christ Himself is “the Word.”³⁶

Of this I testify as an Apostle called to the Lord’s divine service—to declare His word—and called to stand as a special witness of Him. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Alma 31:5.
2. Genesis 1:3.
3. Matthew 24:35.
4. John 14:23.
5. Luke 1:38.
6. Russell M. Nelson, “I Studied More Than 2,200 Scriptures about the Savior in Six Weeks: Here Is a Little of What I Learned,” *Inspiration* (blog), Feb. 28, 2017, ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
7. “More Holiness Give Me,” *Hymns*, no. 131.
8. Joseph Smith—History 1:17.
9. The prophet Lehi describes “the arms of his love” in his declaration to his sons: “But behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love” (2 Nephi 1:15).



By President Susan H. Porter
Primary General President

10. President Russell M. Nelson said, “Prophets testify of Jesus Christ—of His divinity and of His earthly mission and ministry” (“Sustaining the Prophets,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2014, 74).
11. Russell M. Nelson, “As We Go Forward Together,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Apr. 2018, 7.
12. Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel” (worldwide youth devotional, June 3, 2018), Gospel Library.
13. Russell M. Nelson, “Let God Prevail,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2020, 92.
14. Russell M. Nelson, “President Nelson Shares Social Post about Racism and Calls for Respect for Human Dignity,” June 1, 2020, newsroom.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
15. Russell M. Nelson, in Sarah Jane Weaver, “President Nelson Invites Us to #GiveThanks,” *Church News*, Nov. 20, 2020, thechurchnews.com.
16. Russell M. Nelson, “Overcome the World and Find Rest,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2022, 98.
17. Russell M. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity” (worldwide devotional for young adults, May 15, 2022), Gospel Library.
18. Russell M. Nelson, “Peacemakers Needed,” *Liahona*, May 2023, 99; see also facebook.com/reel/277880588051925.
19. Russell M. Nelson, “Think Celestial!,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2023, 118–19.
20. Jacob 4:13.
21. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: George Albert Smith* (2011), 64.
22. Jacob 7:5.
23. The Bangkok Thailand Temple was dedicated on October 22, 2023.
24. The temple district reaches beyond Thailand’s borders, spanning Cambodia to Pakistan, Nepal to Indonesia.
25. Ephesians 2:21.
26. See Thomas S. Monson, “Blessings of the Temple,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2015, 91.
27. See “News for Temples in Five Nations,” Mar. 27, 2023, newsroom.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
28. See dedicatory prayer for the Bangkok Thailand Temple, temples.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
29. An emoji, often a little yellow face, is a pictogram embedded in an electronic message to convey a feeling, expression, or idea.
30. Thomas S. Monson, “To the Rescue,” *Ensign*, May 2001, 48; *Liahona*, July 2001, 57.
31. 2 Nephi 32:3.
32. 2 Nephi 32:3.
33. 2 Nephi 32:2.
34. Nephi wrote, “For when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men” (2 Nephi 33:1).
35. Isaiah 9:6.
36. John 1:1.

Pray, He Is There

I invite you to pray to know Heavenly Father is there, pray to grow to become like Him, and pray to show His love to others.

Brothers and sisters, I feel joy as I respond to an impression to speak to children!

Girls and boys, wherever you are in the world, I want to share something with you.

Our Heavenly Father loves you! You are His child. He knows you. He wants to bless you. I pray with all my heart that you will feel His love.

Do you like to receive gifts? I want to talk to you about a very special gift that Heavenly Father has given to you to help you. It is the gift of prayer. What a blessing prayer is! We can talk to Heavenly Father anytime, anywhere.

When Jesus was on the earth, He taught us to pray. He said, “Ask, and ye shall receive.”¹

What gifts can you pray for? There are many, but today I want to share three:

1. Pray to know.
2. Pray to grow.
3. Pray to show.

Let’s talk about each one.

First, Pray to Know

What do you need to *know*?

There is a song about prayer that Primary children sing all over the world. It starts with a question. Do

you know what song it is? If I were really brave, I would sing it to you!

“Heavenly Father, are you really there? And do you hear and answer ev’ry child’s prayer?”²

How can you know that Heavenly Father is really there, even when you can’t see Him?

President Russell M. Nelson has invited you to “pour out your heart to your Heavenly Father. . . . And then listen!”³ Listen to what you feel in your heart and to thoughts that come to your mind.⁴

Heavenly Father has a glorified body of flesh and bones and is the Father of your spirit. Because Heavenly Father has all power and knows all things, He can see all His children⁵ and can hear and answer every prayer. You can come to *know* for yourself that He is there and that He loves you.

When you know that Heavenly Father is real and that He loves



When Jesus was on the earth, He taught us to pray.



Ecuador

you, you can live with courage and hope! “Pray, he is there; speak, he is list’ning.”⁶

Have you ever felt alone? One day when our granddaughter Ashley was six years old, she was the only one without a friend to play with on the school playground. As she stood there, feeling unimportant and unseen, a specific thought came into her mind: “Wait! I’m not alone! I have Christ!” Ashley knelt down right in the middle of the playground, folded her arms, and prayed to Heavenly Father. The moment she opened her eyes, a girl her age was standing there asking her if she wanted to play. Ashley came to know, “We are important to the Lord, and we are never truly alone.”

Sometimes you may want to *know* why something hard is happening in your life or why you didn’t receive a blessing you prayed for. Often the best question to ask Heavenly Father is not *why* but *what*.

Do you remember when Nephi and his family were hungry while they were traveling in the wilderness? When Nephi and his brothers went to hunt for food, Nephi broke his bow. But he didn’t ask why.

Nephi made a new bow and asked his father, Lehi, where he could go to get food. Lehi prayed, and the Lord showed them where Nephi could go.⁷ Heavenly Father will guide you when you ask Him *what* you can do and *what* you can learn.

Second, Pray to Grow

Heavenly Father wants to help you *grow*! He loves us so much that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to show us the way to live.⁸ Jesus suffered, died, and was resurrected so we can be forgiven of our sins and *grow* to become more like Him.

Do you want to *grow* in patience or in honesty? Do you want to *grow* in a skill? Maybe you are shy and want to *grow* in courage. “Pray, he is there!”⁹

Through His Spirit, your heart can change, and you can receive strength.

My new friend Jonah wrote: “I often feel nervous on my way to school in the morning. I worry about things like being late, forgetting something, and taking tests. When I was 10, I started saying prayers on my drive to school with my mom. I ask for the help I need, and I pray for my family too. I also think of the things I’m grateful for. [Praying to Heavenly Father has] helped me. Sometimes I don’t feel the relief right as I get out of the car, but by the time I’m at my classroom, I feel peaceful.”¹⁰

Jonah’s faith is *growing* as he prays every day and then moves forward.

Third, Pray to Show

You can pray for help to *show* Heavenly Father’s love to others.¹¹ Through His Spirit, Heavenly Father will help you notice someone who is sad so you can comfort them. He can help you *show* His love by forgiving

someone. He can give you courage to serve someone and share with them that they are a child of God. You can help others come to know and love Jesus and Heavenly Father as you do.¹²

For my whole life I prayed that my father would become a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Even as a young girl, I knew how many blessings *he* could receive. Our *family* could receive the blessings of being sealed for eternity. My family, friends, and I prayed often for him, but he didn't join the Church. Heavenly Father does not force anyone to make a choice.¹³ He can send us answers to our prayers in other ways.

When I was old enough, I received my patriarchal blessing. In the blessing, the patriarch told me the best thing I could do to help my family be together in heaven was to be an example of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's what I could do!

My father lived to be 86. Five days after he died, I received a sacred feeling of joy. Heavenly Father let me know through His Spirit that my father wanted to receive the blessings of the gospel of Jesus Christ! I will never forget the day I knelt around the altar in the temple with my sister and brothers to be sealed to my parents. I had started praying for this blessing when I was in Primary, and I received it when I was a grandmother.

Perhaps you are praying for blessings for your family and others you love. Don't give up! Heavenly Father will *show* you what you can do.

Share with Heavenly Father what is in your heart.¹⁴ As you sincerely ask for His help, you will receive His Spirit to guide you.¹⁵ Praying every day will fill you with love for Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. This will help you want to follow Them your whole life!

Imagine what would happen if all the children in Africa, South America, Asia, Europe, North America, and

Australia prayed every day. The whole world would be blessed with more of God's love!

I invite you to *pray to know* Heavenly Father is there, *pray to grow* to become like Him, and *pray to show* His love to others. I know He lives and loves *you*. "Pray, he is there." In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. John 16:24; see also 3 Nephi 27:29.
2. "A Child's Prayer," *Children's Songbook*, 12.
3. Russell M. Nelson, "Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2018, 95.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 11:13.
5. See Moses 1:6–8, 27–29, 35.
6. "A Child's Prayer," 12.
7. See 1 Nephi 16:18, 23–24.
8. See John 3:16–17.
9. "A Child's Prayer," 12.
10. Personal correspondence.
11. See John 13:34–35.
12. See Alma 20:26–27; 22.
13. See 2 Nephi 2:27; Helaman 14:30.
14. See Mosiah 24:12; Alma 37:37.
15. See Doctrine and Covenants 19:38.



Guatemala



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

The Powerful, Virtuous Cycle of the Doctrine of Christ

I invite you to live the doctrine of Christ repeatedly, iteratively, and intentionally and help others on their way.

Years ago, my wife, Ruth; our daughter, Ashley; and I joined other tourists on a kayaking excursion in the state of Hawaii in the United States. A kayak is a low-to-the-water, canoe-like boat in which the rower sits facing

forward and uses a double-bladed paddle to pull front to back on one side and then on the other. The plan was to row to two small islands off the coast of Oahu and back again. I was confident because, as a young man,

I had paddled kayaks across mountain lakes. Hubris never bodes well, does it?

Our guide gave us instructions and showed us the ocean kayaks we would use. They differed from the ones I had previously paddled. I was supposed to sit on top of the kayak, instead of down inside it. When I got onto the kayak, my center of gravity was higher than I was accustomed to, and I was less stable in the water.

As we started out, I rowed faster than Ruth and Ashley. After a while, I was far ahead of them. Though proud of my heroic pace, I stopped paddling and waited for them to catch up. A large wave—about 13 centimeters¹—hit the side of my kayak and flipped me over into the water. By the time I had turned the kayak upright and struggled to get back on top, Ruth and Ashley had passed me by, but I was too winded to resume paddling. Before I could catch my breath,



French Polynesia



Ecuador

another wave, this one truly enormous—at least 20 centimeters²—hit my kayak and flipped me over again. By the time I managed to right the kayak, I was so out of breath I feared I would not be able to climb on top.

Seeing my situation, the guide rowed over and steadied my kayak, making it easier for me to climb on top. When he saw that I was still too breathless to row on my own, he hitched a towrope to my kayak and began paddling, pulling me along with him. Soon I caught my breath and began paddling adequately on my own. He let go of the rope, and I reached the first island without further assistance. Upon arrival, I flopped down on the sand, exhausted.

After the group had rested, the guide quietly said to me, “Mr. Renlund, if you just keep paddling, maintaining your momentum, I think you’re going to be fine.” I followed his advice as we paddled to the second island and then back to our starting point. Twice the guide rowed by and told me I was doing great. Even larger waves hit my kayak from the side, but I was not flipped over.

By consistently paddling the kayak, I maintained momentum and forward progress, mitigating the effect of waves hitting me from the side. The same principle applies in our spiritual

lives. We become vulnerable when we slow down and especially when we stop.³ If we maintain spiritual momentum by continually “rowing” toward the Savior, we are safer and more secure because our eternal life depends on our faith in Him.⁴

Spiritual momentum is created “over a lifetime as we repeatedly embrace the doctrine of Christ.”⁵ Doing so, President Russell M. Nelson taught, produces a “powerful virtuous cycle.”⁶ Indeed, the elements of the doctrine of Christ—such as faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance, entering a covenant relationship with the Lord through baptism, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end⁷—are not intended to be experienced as one-time, check-the-box events. In particular, “enduring to the end” is not really a separate step in the doctrine of Christ—as though we complete the first four elements and then hunker down, grit our teeth, and wait to die. No, enduring to the end is repeatedly and iteratively applying the other elements of the doctrine of Christ, creating the “powerful virtuous cycle” that President Nelson described.⁸

Repeatedly means that we experience the elements of the doctrine of Christ over and over throughout our lives. *Iteratively* means that we build

on and improve with each repetition. Even though we repeat the elements, we are not just spinning in circles without a forward trajectory. Instead, we draw closer to Jesus Christ each time through the cycle.

Momentum involves both speed and direction.⁹ If I had paddled the kayak vigorously in the wrong direction, I could have created significant momentum, but I would not have reached the intended destination. Similarly, in life, we need to “row” toward the Savior to come unto Him.¹⁰

Our faith in Jesus Christ needs to be nourished daily.¹¹ It is nourished as we pray daily, study the scriptures daily, reflect on the goodness of God daily, repent daily, and follow the promptings of the Holy Ghost daily. Just as it is not healthy to defer eating all our food until Sunday and then binge our weekly allotment of nutrition, it is not spiritually healthy to restrict our testimony-nourishing behavior to one day in the week.¹²

When we assume responsibility for our own testimonies,¹³ we gain spiritual momentum and gradually develop bedrock faith in Jesus Christ, and the doctrine of Christ becomes central to the purpose of life.¹⁴ Momentum likewise builds as we strive to obey the laws of God and repent. Repentance is joyful and allows us to learn from our mistakes, which is how we progress eternally. We will undoubtedly have times when we flip over in our kayaks and find ourselves in deep water. Through repentance, we can get back on top and continue, no matter how many times we have fallen off.¹⁵ The important part is that we do not give up.

The next element of the doctrine of Christ is baptism, which includes the baptism of water and, through confirmation, the baptism of the Holy

Ghost.¹⁶ While baptism is a singular event, we renew our baptismal covenant repeatedly when we partake of the sacrament. The sacrament does not replace baptism, but it links the initial elements in the doctrine of Christ—faith and repentance—with reception of the Holy Ghost.¹⁷ As we conscientiously partake of the sacrament,¹⁸ we invite the Holy Ghost into our lives, just like when we were baptized and confirmed.¹⁹ As we keep the covenant described in the sacrament prayers, the Holy Ghost becomes our companion.

As the Holy Ghost exerts a greater influence in our lives, we progressively and iteratively develop Christlike attributes. Our hearts change. Our disposition to do evil diminishes. Our inclination to do good increases until we only want “to do good continually.”²⁰ And we thereby access the heavenly power needed to endure to the end.²¹ Our faith has increased, and we are ready to repeat the powerful, virtuous cycle again.

Forward spiritual momentum also propels us to make additional

covenants with God in the house of the Lord. Multiple covenants draw us closer to Christ and connect us more strongly to Him. Through these covenants, we have greater access to His power. To be clear, baptismal and temple covenants are not, in and of themselves, the source of power. The source of power is the Lord Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father. Making and keeping covenants create a conduit for Their power in our lives. As we live according to these covenants, we eventually become inheritors to all that Heavenly Father has.²² The momentum produced by living the doctrine of Christ not only powers the transformation of our divine nature into our eternal destiny but also motivates us to help others in appropriate ways.

Consider how the expedition guide helped me after I flipped over in the kayak. He did not shout from afar an unhelpful question such as, “Mr. Renlund, what are you doing in the water?” He did not paddle up and chide me, saying, “Mr. Renlund, you would not be in this situation if you

were more physically fit.” He did not start towing my kayak while I was just trying to get on top of it. And he did not correct me in front of the group. Instead, he gave me the help I needed at the time I needed it. He gave me advice when I was receptive. And he went out of his way to encourage me.

As we minister to others, we do not need to ask unhelpful questions or state the obvious. Most people who are struggling know that they are struggling. We should not be judgmental; our judgment is neither helpful nor welcome, and it is most often ill-informed.

Comparing ourselves to others can lead us to make pernicious errors, especially if we conclude that we are more righteous than those who are struggling. Such a comparison is like drowning hopelessly in three meters²³ of water, seeing someone else drowning in four meters²⁴ of water, judging him a greater sinner, and feeling good about yourself. After all, we are all struggling in our own way. None of us earns salvation.²⁵ We never can. Jacob, in the Book of Mormon, taught, “Remember, after [we] are reconciled unto God, that it is only in and through the grace of God that [we] are saved.”²⁶ We all need the Savior’s infinite Atonement, not just part of it.

We do need all our compassion, empathy, and love as we interact with those around us.²⁷ Those who are struggling “need to experience the pure love of Jesus Christ reflected in [our] words and actions.”²⁸ As we minister, we encourage others frequently and offer help. Even if someone is not receptive, we continue to minister as they allow. The Savior taught that “unto such shall ye continue to minister; for ye know not but what they will return and repent, and come unto me with full purpose of heart,



Mexico



Guatemala

and I shall heal them; and ye shall be the means of bringing salvation unto them.”²⁹ The Savior’s job is to heal. Our job is to love—to love and minister in such a way that others are drawn to Jesus Christ. This is one of the fruits of the powerful, virtuous cycle of the doctrine of Christ.

I invite you to live the doctrine of Christ repeatedly, iteratively, and intentionally and help others on their way. I testify that the doctrine of Christ is central to Heavenly Father’s plan; it is, after all, His doctrine. As we exercise faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement, we are propelled along the covenant path and motivated to help others become faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. We can become heirs in Heavenly Father’s kingdom, which is the culmination of faithfully living the doctrine of Christ. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Only about five inches.
2. Only about eight inches.
3. In physics, momentum = mass × velocity. When we stop, the velocity is zero. Therefore, the product of mass and velocity

becomes zero, regardless of our prior momentum or the mass.

4. See Russell M. Nelson, “The Power of Spiritual Momentum,” *Liahona*, May 2022, 98. President Nelson counseled, “We have never needed *positive* spiritual momentum more than we do now.” That’s the best way to move “forward amid . . . fear and uncertainty.” See also 2 Nephi 2:6–7; 9:23–24.
5. Russell M. Nelson, “Overcome the World and Find Rest,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2022, 97.
6. Russell M. Nelson, “Overcome the World,” 97.
7. The phrase “the doctrine of Christ” means the same as the phrase “the gospel of Jesus Christ.” See 2 Nephi 31:2–21; 3 Nephi 9:14–22; 11:7–41; 27:1–21.
8. Disengaging from any of the elements in the doctrine of Christ slows or stops our spiritual momentum. See 2 Nephi 28:30; Alma 12:10–11; Doctrine and Covenants 20:31–34; 50:24.
9. In physics, momentum = mass × velocity. Velocity is the speed in combination with the direction of motion of an object. Velocity is a vector and is inherently directional.
10. See 2 Nephi 2:6–7; 9:23–24.
11. See Russell M. Nelson, “The Power of Spiritual Momentum,” 99.
12. See Colossians 2:6–7.
13. See Russell M. Nelson, “Overcome the World,” 97. Underlining the importance of our testimonies in maintaining spiritual momentum, the statement by President Nelson to take charge of our testimonies

was also quoted by President M. Russell Ballard (see “Follow Jesus Christ with Footsteps of Faith,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2022, 35) and Elder Quentin L. Cook (see “Be True to God and His Work,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2022, 120).

14. See “The Restoration of the Fulness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ: A Bicentennial Proclamation to the World,” Gospel Library; Russell M. Nelson, “A Plea to My Sisters,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2015, 97.
15. See Mosiah 26:30; Alma 34:31; Moroni 6:8; Doctrine and Covenants 58:42.
16. See 2 Nephi 31:13.
17. Elder James E. Talmage wrote, “In the course of our study of the principles and ordinances of the Gospel, as specified in the fourth of the Articles of Faith, the subject of the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper very properly claims attention, the observance of this ordinance being required of all who have become members of the Church of Christ through compliance with the requirements of faith, repentance, and baptism by water and of the Holy Ghost” (*The Articles of Faith*, 12th ed. [1924], 171).
18. See Doctrine and Covenants 59:9.
19. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Special Witnesses of Christ,” *Ensign*, Apr. 2001, 13; *Liahona*, Apr. 2001, 14.
20. Mosiah 5:2.
21. See, for instance, 2 Nephi 31:2–21; 3 Nephi 11:23–31; 27:13–21; Moroni 4:3; 5:2; 6:6; Doctrine and Covenants 20:77, 79; 59:8–9.
22. See Doctrine and Covenants 14:7; 84:33–38.
23. About 10 feet.
24. About 13 feet.
25. See Ephesians 2:8–9.
26. 2 Nephi 10:24.
27. President Jeffrey R. Holland taught: “When a battered, weary swimmer tries valiantly to get back to shore, after having fought strong winds and rough waves which he should never have challenged in the first place, those of us who might have had better judgment, or perhaps just better luck, ought not to row out to his side, beat him with our oars, and shove his head back underwater. That’s not what boats were made for. But some of us do that to each other” (“A Robe, a Ring, and a Fatted Calf” [Brigham Young University devotional, Jan. 31, 1984], 5, speeches.byu.edu).
28. Russell M. Nelson, “Peacemakers Needed,” *Liahona*, May 2023, 100.
29. 3 Nephi 18:32.



By Elder Paul B. Pieper
Of the Seventy

Trust in the Lord

Our relationship with God will grow only to the degree we are willing to place our trust in Him.

In our family, we sometimes play a game we call “The Crazy Trust Exercise.” You may have played it too. Two people stand a few feet apart, one with their back toward the other. On a signal from the person behind, the person in front falls backward into the waiting arms of their friend.

Trust is the foundation of all relationships. A threshold question to any relationship is “Can I trust the other person?” A relationship forms only when people are willing to place trust in each other. It is not a relationship if one person trusts completely but the other does not.

Each of us is a beloved spirit son or daughter of a loving Heavenly Father.¹ But while that spiritual genealogy provides a foundation, it does not of itself create a meaningful relationship with God. A relationship can be built only when we choose to trust in Him.

Heavenly Father desires to build a close, personal relationship with each of His spirit children.² Jesus expressed that desire when He prayed, “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.”³ The relationship God seeks with each spirit child is one so close and personal that He will be able to share all He has and all He is.⁴ That kind of deep, enduring relationship can develop only when built upon perfect, total trust.

For His part, Heavenly Father has worked from the beginning to

communicate His absolute trust in the divine potential of each of His children. Trust underlies the plan He presented for our growth and progression prior to our coming to earth. He would teach us eternal laws, create an earth, provide us with mortal bodies, give us the gift to choose for ourselves, and permit us to learn and grow by making our own choices. He wants us to choose to follow His laws and return to enjoy eternal life with Him and His Son.

Knowing that we would not always make good choices, He also prepared a way for us to escape from the consequences of bad choices. He provided us a Savior—His Son, Jesus Christ—to atone for our sins and make us clean again on condition of repentance.⁵ He invites us to use the precious gift of repentance regularly.⁶

Every parent knows how difficult it is to trust a child enough to let them make their own decisions, especially when the parent knows the child is likely to make mistakes and suffer as a result. Yet Heavenly Father allows us to make the choices that will help us reach our divine potential! As Elder Dale G. Renlund taught, “[His] goal in parenting is not to have His children *do* what is right; it is to have His children *choose* to do what is right and ultimately become like Him.”⁷

Notwithstanding God’s trust in us, our relationship with Him will grow

only to the degree we are willing to place our trust in Him. The challenge is that we live in a fallen world and have all experienced a betrayal of trust as the result of dishonesty, manipulation, coercion, or other circumstances. Once betrayed, we may struggle to trust again. These negative trust experiences with imperfect mortals may even impact our willingness to trust in a perfect Heavenly Father.

Several years ago, two friends of mine, Leonid and Valentina, expressed interest in becoming members of the Church. As Leonid began to learn the gospel, he found it difficult to pray. Earlier in his life, Leonid had suffered from manipulation and control by superiors and had developed a distrust of authority. These experiences affected his ability to open his heart and express personal feelings to Heavenly Father. With time and study, Leonid gained a better understanding of God’s character and experienced feeling God’s love. Eventually, prayer became a natural way for him to express thanks and the love he was feeling for God. His increasing trust in God eventually led him and Valentina to enter into sacred covenants to strengthen their relationship with God and each other.

If prior loss of trust is keeping you from trusting God, please follow Leonid’s example. Patiently continue to learn more about Heavenly Father, His character, His attributes, and His purposes. Look for and record experiences feeling His love and power in your life. Our living prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, has taught that the more we learn about God, the easier it will be for us to trust Him.⁸

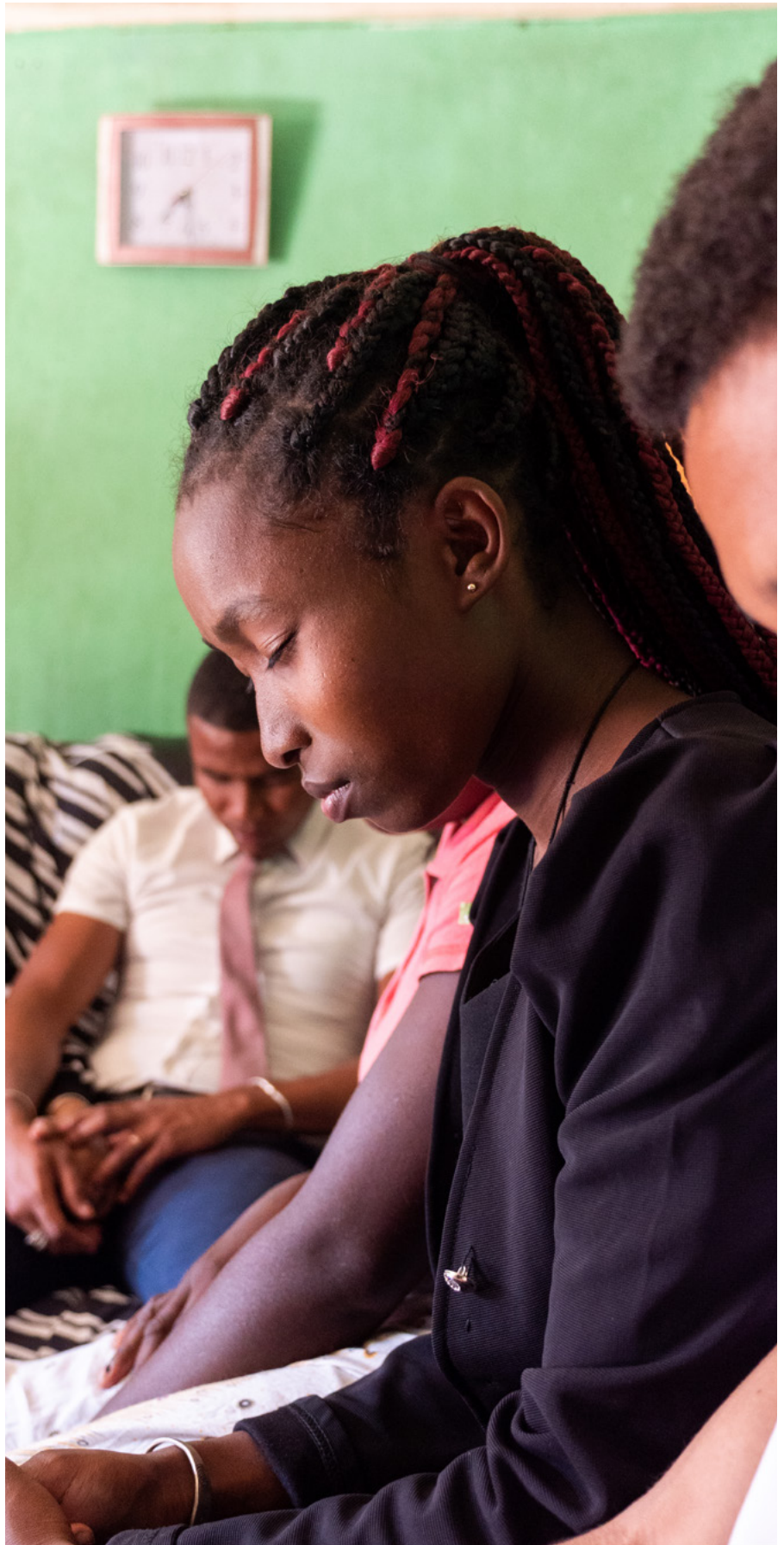
Sometimes the best way to learn to trust God is simply by trusting Him. Like “The Crazy Trust Exercise,”

sometimes we just need to be willing to fall backward and let Him catch us. Our mortal life is a test. Challenges that stretch us beyond our own capacity come frequently. When our own knowledge and understanding are inadequate, we naturally look for resources to help us. In an information-saturated world, there is no shortage of sources promoting their solutions to our challenges. However, the simple, time-tested counsel in Proverbs provides the best advice: “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart.”⁹ We show our trust in God by turning to Him first when confronted with life’s challenges.

After I finished law school in Utah, our family faced the important decision of where to work and make our home. After counseling with each other and the Lord, we felt directed to move our family to the eastern United States, far from parents and siblings. Initially, things went well, and we felt confirmed in our decision. But then things changed. There was downsizing at the law firm, and I faced the prospect of no job or insurance at the very time our daughter Dora was born with serious medical challenges and long-term special needs. While confronting these challenges, I was extended a call to serve that would require significant time and commitment.

I had never faced such a challenge and was overwhelmed. I began to question the decision we had made and its accompanying confirmation. We had trusted in the Lord, and things were supposed to work out. I had fallen backward, and it now appeared that no one was going to catch me.

One day the words “Don’t ask why; ask what I want you to learn” came distinctly into my mind and heart.



Madagascar

Now I was even more confused. In the very moment I was struggling with my earlier decision, God was inviting me to trust Him even more. Looking back, this was a critical point in my life—it was the moment when I realized that the best way to learn to trust in God was simply by trusting Him. In the subsequent weeks, I watched with amazement as the Lord miraculously unfolded His plan to bless our family.

Good teachers and coaches know that intellectual growth and physical strength can happen only when minds and muscles are stretched. Likewise, God invites us to grow by trusting His spiritual tutoring through soul-stretching experiences. Therefore, we can be sure that whatever trust we may have demonstrated in God in the past, another trust-stretching experience lies yet ahead. God is focused on our growth and progress. He is the Master Teacher, the complete coach who is always stretching us to help us realize more

of our divine potential. That will always include a future invitation to trust Him just a little bit more.

The Book of Mormon teaches the pattern God uses to stretch us in order to build strong relationships with us. In *Come, Follow Me*, we recently studied about how Nephi's trust in God was tested when he and his brothers were commanded to return to Jerusalem to obtain the brass plates. After their initial attempts failed, his brothers gave up and were ready to return without the plates. But Nephi chose to place his complete trust in the Lord and was successful in obtaining the plates.¹⁰ That experience likely strengthened Nephi's confidence in God when his bow broke and the family was facing starvation in the wilderness. Again, Nephi chose to trust in God, and the family was saved.¹¹ These successive experiences gave Nephi even stronger confidence in God for the enormous, trust-stretching task he would soon face of building a ship.¹²

Through these experiences, Nephi strengthened his relationship with God by consistently and continuously trusting Him. God uses the same pattern with us. He extends us personal invitations to strengthen and deepen our trust in Him.¹³ Each time we accept and act on an invitation, our trust in God grows. If we ignore or decline an invitation, our progress stops until we're ready to act on a new invitation.

The good news is that regardless of the trust we may or may not have chosen to place in God in the past, we can choose to trust God today and every day going forward. I promise that each time we do, God will be there to catch us, and our relationship of trust will grow stronger and stronger until the day that we become one with Him and His Son. Then we can declare like Nephi, "O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever."¹⁴ In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," Gospel Library.
2. See Doctrine and Covenants 88:63.
3. John 17:21.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:38.
5. See Alma 34:15–17.
6. "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" (Russell M. Nelson, "We Can Do Better and Be Better," *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2019, 67).
7. Dale G. Renlund, "Choose You This Day," *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 104.
8. See Russell M. Nelson, "Christ Is Risen; Faith in Him Will Move Mountains," *Liahona*, May 2021, 103.
9. Proverbs 3:5.
10. See 1 Nephi 3–4.
11. See 1 Nephi 16:18–31.
12. See 1 Nephi 17:8.
13. God's personal invitations to each of us come through reading the scriptures, from living prophets, and by the whisperings of the Holy Ghost.
14. 2 Nephi 4:34.



Ivory Coast



By Elder Patrick Kearon
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

God’s Intent Is to Bring You Home

Everything about the Father’s plan for His beloved children is designed to bring everyone home.

I would like to express gratitude for your prayers as I have started the process of adjusting to the call, through President Nelson, to serve as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. You can probably well imagine how humbling this has felt, and it has been a time of extraordinary upheaval and sobering self-examination. It is, however, indeed a great honour to serve the Saviour, in any capacity, and to be engaged with you in sharing the good news of His gospel of hope.

Beyond that, it has been said that behind every new Apostle stands an astonished mother-in-law. I don’t know if that has actually been said, but in this case, it certainly could be. And I suspect that the fact that my mother-in-law is no longer with us does nothing to reduce her astonishment.

Several months ago, when my wife and I were visiting another country for various Church assignments, I woke up early one morning and looked blearily outside our hotel window. Down below on the busy street, I saw that a roadblock had been set up with a policeman stationed nearby to turn cars around as they reached the barrier. At first, only a few cars traveled along the road and were turned back. But as time went by and

traffic increased, queues of cars began to build up.

From the window above, I watched as the policeman seemed to take satisfaction in his power to block the flow of traffic and turn people away. In fact, he seemed to develop a spring in his step, as if he might start doing a little jig, as each car approached the barrier. If a driver got frustrated about the roadblock, the policeman did not appear helpful or sympathetic. He just shook his head repeatedly and pointed in the opposite direction.

My friends, my fellow disciples on the road of mortal life, our Father’s beautiful plan, even His “fabulous” plan,¹ is designed to bring you home, *not* to keep you out.² No one has built a roadblock and stationed someone there to turn you around and send you away. In fact, it is the exact opposite. God is in relentless pursuit of you. He “wants all of His children to choose to return to Him,”³ and He employs every possible measure to bring you back.

Our loving Father oversaw the Creation of this very earth for the express purpose of providing an opportunity for you and for me to have the stretching and refining experiences of mortality, the chance to use our God-given moral agency



Mexico

to choose Him,⁴ to learn and grow, to make mistakes, to repent, to love God and our neighbour, and to one day return home to Him.

He sent His precious Beloved Son to this fallen world to live the full range of the human experience, to provide an example for the rest of His children to follow, and to atone and redeem. Christ’s great atoning gift removes every roadblock of physical and spiritual death that would separate us from our eternal home.

Everything about the Father’s plan for His beloved children is designed to bring everyone home.

What do God’s messengers, His prophets, call this plan in Restoration scripture? They call it the plan of redemption,⁵ the plan of mercy,⁶ the great plan of happiness,⁷ and the plan of salvation, which is unto all, “through the blood of mine Only Begotten.”⁸

The intent of the Father’s great plan of happiness is your *happiness*, right here, right now, and in the eternities. It is not to prevent your happiness and cause you instead worry and fear.



Ecuador

The intent of the Father’s plan of redemption is in fact your *redemption*, your being rescued through the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ,⁹ freed from the captivity of sin and death. It is not to leave you as you are.

The intent of the Father’s plan of mercy is to *extend mercy* as you turn back to Him and honour your covenant of fidelity to Him. It is not to deny mercy and inflict pain and sorrow.

The intent of the Father’s plan of salvation is in fact your *salvation* in the celestial kingdom of glory as you receive “the testimony of Jesus”¹⁰ and offer your whole soul to Him.¹¹ It is not to keep you out.

Does this mean anything goes with regard to how we live our lives? That the way we choose to use our agency doesn’t matter? That we can take or leave God’s commandments? No, of course not. Surely one of Jesus’s most consistent invitations and pleas during His mortal ministry was that we change and repent and come unto Him.¹² Fundamentally implicit in all of His teachings to live on a higher plane

of moral conduct¹³ is a call to personal progression, to transformative faith in Christ, to a mighty change of heart.¹⁴

God wants for us a radical reorientation of our selfish and prideful impulses, the eviction of the natural man,¹⁵ for us to “go, and sin no more.”¹⁶

If we believe the intent of the Father’s all-reaching plan is to save us, redeem us, extend mercy to us, and thereby bring us happiness, what is the intent of the Son through whom this great plan is brought about?

The Son tells us Himself: “For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.”¹⁷

Jesus’s will is the benevolent Father’s will! He wants to make it possible for every last one of His Father’s children to receive the end goal of the plan—eternal life with Them. None is excluded from this divine potential.

If you are prone to worry that you will never measure up, or that the loving reach of Christ’s infinite Atonement mercifully covers everyone else but not you, then you

misunderstand. *Infinite* means infinite. *Infinite* covers you and those you love.¹⁸

Nephi explains this beautiful truth: “He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation.”¹⁹

The Saviour, the Good Shepherd, goes in search of His lost sheep until He finds them.²⁰ He is “not willing that any should perish.”²¹

“Mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive.”²²

“Have ye any that are sick among you? Bring them hither. Have ye any that are lame, or blind, or halt, or maimed, or leprous, or that are withered, or that are deaf, or that are afflicted in any manner? Bring them hither and I will heal them, for I have compassion upon you.”²³

He did not cast away the woman with the issue of blood; He did not recoil from the leper; He did not

reject the woman taken in adultery; He did not refuse the penitent—no matter their sin. And He will not refuse you or those you love when you bring to Him your broken hearts and contrite spirits. That is *not* His intent or His design, nor His plan, purpose, wish, or hope.

No, He does not put up roadblocks and barriers; He removes them. He does not keep you out; He welcomes you in.²⁴ His entire ministry was a living declaration of this intent.

Then of course there is His atoning sacrifice itself, which is harder for us to understand, beyond our mortal capacity to comprehend. But, and this is an important “but,” we do understand, can comprehend, the holy, saving intent of His atoning sacrifice.

The veil of the temple was rent in twain when Jesus died upon the cross, symbolising that access back to the presence of the Father had been ripped wide open—to all who will turn to Him, trust Him, cast their burdens on Him, and take His yoke upon them in a covenant bond.²⁵

In other words, the Father’s plan is not about roadblocks. It never was; it never will be. Are there things we need to do, commandments to keep, aspects of our natures to change? Yes. But with His grace, those are within our reach, not beyond our grasp.

This is the good news! I am unspeakably grateful for these simple truths. The Father’s design, His plan, His purpose, His intent, His wish, and His hope are all to heal you, all to give you peace, all to bring you, and those you love, home. Of this I am a witness in the name of Jesus Christ, His Son, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, “Think Celestial!,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2023, 117, 118.
2. See 2 Nephi 26:25, 27.

3. *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 1.1, Gospel Library.
4. See Moses 7:33.
5. See Jacob 6:8; Alma 12:30.
6. See Alma 42:15.
7. See Alma 42:8, 16.
8. Moses 6:62.
9. See Doctrine and Covenants 45:4.
10. See Doctrine and Covenants 76:50–70.
11. See Omni 1:26.
12. See Matthew 4:17.
13. See Matthew 5–7. For example, in Matthew 5:43–44, the Savior taught His disciples that it was not enough to “love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.” To follow Him, they also needed to “love [their] enemies.”
14. See Mosiah 5:2. In order for the mercy of Jesus Christ to be able to come into play in our lives, we must turn back to Him. Alma the Younger teaches that this glorious “plan of redemption could not be brought about, only on conditions of repentance . . . ; for except it were for these conditions, mercy could not take effect” (Alma 42:13).
15. See Mosiah 3:19.
16. John 8:11.
17. John 6:38.
18. See Russell M. Nelson, “The Atonement,”

Ensign, Nov. 1996, 35: “His Atonement is infinite—without an end. It was also infinite in that all humankind would be saved from never-ending death. It was infinite in terms of His immense suffering. It was infinite in time, putting an end to the preceding prototype of animal sacrifice. It was infinite in scope—it was to be done once for all. And the mercy of the Atonement extends not only to an infinite number of people, but also to an infinite number of worlds created by Him. It was infinite beyond any human scale of measurement or mortal comprehension.”

19. 2 Nephi 26:24.
20. See Luke 15:4.
21. 2 Peter 3:9; see also Doctrine and Covenants 18:11–12.
22. 3 Nephi 9:14.
23. 3 Nephi 17:7; see also verse 6.
24. In Jesus Christ’s teachings indicating that some individuals will not inherit the kingdom of heaven, He makes it clear that this outcome is not His desire for them but is a result of their own choices (see Matthew 7:13–14, 21–25).
25. See Matthew 27:50–51; Hebrews 9:6–12.



French Polynesia



By Elder Brian K. Taylor
Of the Seventy

Swallowed Up in the Joy of Christ

I testify that our Heavenly Father hears your tearful pleadings and will always respond in perfect wisdom.

We love you, Elder Kearon. May I borrow that accent for 10 minutes?

Yearned-for Miracles

In the New Testament we learn of blind Bartimaeus, who cried out to Jesus desiring a miracle. “Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And *immediately* he received his sight.”¹

On another occasion a man in Bethsaida longed for healing. In contrast, this miracle *did not come instantly*. Rather, Jesus blessed him *twice* before he “was restored.”²

In a third example, the Apostle Paul “*besought the Lord thrice*” in his affliction,³ and yet, to our knowledge, *his earnest supplication was not granted*.

Three different people. Three unique experiences.

Thus, a question: Why do some receive their yearned-for miracles quickly, while others patiently endure, waiting upon the Lord?⁴ We may not know the *why*, yet gratefully, we know He *who* “loveth [us]”⁵ and “[doeth] all things for [our] welfare and happiness.”⁶

Divine Purposes

God, who sees the end from the beginning,⁷ reassures, “Thine

adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment,”⁸ and they shall be consecrated “for thy gain.”⁹

Helping us find further meaning in our trials, Elder Orson F. Whitney taught: “No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. It ministers to our education. . . . All . . . that we [patiently] endure . . . builds up our characters, purifies our hearts, expands our souls, and makes us more tender and charitable. . . . It is through sorrow and suffering, toil and tribulation, that we gain the education that we come here to acquire and which will make us more like our [heavenly parents].”¹⁰

Understanding that “the power of Christ [would] rest upon [him]” in his afflictions, the Apostle Paul said humbly, “For when I am weak, then am I strong.”¹¹

Life’s trials prove us.¹² Even the Savior “learned . . . obedience by” and was made “perfect through sufferings.”¹³

And one day He will compassionately declare, “Behold, I have refined *thee*, I have chosen *thee* in the furnace of affliction.”¹⁴

Coming to trust in God’s divine purposes breathes hope into weary souls and kindles determination in seasons of anguish and heartache.¹⁵

Divine Perspectives

Years ago, President Russell M. Nelson shared this valuable insight: “As we look at all things with eternal perspective, it will significantly lighten our load.”¹⁶

My wife, Jill, and I recently witnessed this truth in the faithful lives of Holly and Rick Porter, whose 12-year-old son, Trey, passed away in a tragic fire. With hands and feet severely burned in a heroic attempt to save her dear son, Holly later testified in ward sacrament meeting of the great peace and joy the Lord had poured out upon her family in their anguish, using words such as *miraculous*, *incredible*, and *amazing*.

This precious mother’s unbearable grief was replaced by surpassing peace with this thought: “My hands are not the hands that save. Those hands belong to the Savior! Instead of looking at my scars as a reminder of what I was not able to do, I remember the scars my Savior bears.”

Holly’s witness fulfills our prophet’s promise: “As you think celestial, you will view trials and opposition in a new light.”¹⁷

Elder D. Todd Christofferson stated: “I believe that the challenge of overcoming and growing from adversity appealed to us when God presented His plan of redemption in the premortal world. We should approach that challenge now knowing that our Heavenly Father will sustain us. *But it is crucial that we turn to Him*. Without God, the dark experiences of suffering and adversity tend to despondency, despair, and even bitterness.”¹⁸

Divine Principles

To avoid the darkness of discontent and instead find greater peace, hope, and even joy during life’s difficult



Ivory Coast

challenges, I share three divine principles as invitations.

One—stronger faith comes by putting Jesus Christ first.¹⁹ “Look unto me in every thought,” He declares; “doubt not, fear not.”²⁰ President Nelson taught:

“[Our] eternal life is dependent upon [our] faith in [Christ] and in His Atonement.”²¹

“As I have wrestled with the intense pain caused by my recent injury, I have felt even deeper appreciation for Jesus Christ and the incomprehensible gift of His Atonement. Think of it! The Savior suffered ‘pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind’ so that He can comfort us, heal us, [and] rescue us in times of need.”²²

He continued: “My injury has caused me to reflect again and again on ‘the greatness of the Holy One of Israel.’ During my healing, the Lord has manifested His divine power in peaceful and unmistakable ways.”²³

“In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer,” our Savior encourages; “I have overcome the world.”²⁴

Two—brighter hope comes by envisioning our eternal destiny.²⁵

In speaking of the power inherent in keeping “a vision of our Father’s incredible promised blessings . . . before our eyes every day,” Sister Linda Reeves testified: “I do not know why we have the many trials that we have, but it is my personal feeling that the reward is so great, . . . so joyful and beyond our understanding that in that day of reward, we may feel to say to our merciful, loving Father, ‘Was that all that was required?’ . . . What will it matter . . . what we suffered here if, in the end, those trials . . . qualify us for eternal life . . . in the kingdom of God?”²⁶

President Nelson shared this insight: “Consider the Lord’s response to Joseph Smith when he pleaded for relief in Liberty Jail. The Lord taught the Prophet that his inhumane treatment would give him experience and be for his good. ‘If thou endure it well,’ the Lord promised, ‘God shall exalt thee on high.’ The Lord was teaching Joseph to think celestial and to envision an eternal reward rather than focus on the excruciating difficulties of the day.”²⁷

Joseph’s change in perspective brought deepening sanctification, as reflected in this letter to a friend: “After having been inclosed in the walls of a prison for five months it seems to me that my heart will always be more tender after this than ever it was before. . . . I think I never could have felt as I do now if I had not suffered the wrongs that I have suffered.”²⁸

Three—greater power comes by focusing on joy.²⁹ During eternity’s most crucial, agonizing hours, our Savior did not shrink but partook of the bitter cup.³⁰ How did He do it? We learn, “For the joy that was set before him [Christ] endured the cross,”³¹ His will “being swallowed up in the will of the Father.”³²

This phrase “swallowed up” deeply moves me. My interest was heightened when I learned that in Spanish, “swallowed up” is translated as “consumed”; in German, as “devoured”; and in Chinese, as “engulfed.” Thus, when life’s challenges are most painful and overwhelming, I remember the Lord’s promise—that we “should suffer no manner of afflictions, save it [be] swallowed up [consumed, devoured, and engulfed] in the joy of Christ.”³³

I see in so many of you this joy, which “[defies] . . . mortal comprehension,”³⁴ even though your bitter cups have not yet been removed. Thank you for keeping your covenants and standing as witnesses for God.³⁵ Thank you for reaching out to bless us all, while “in [your] quiet heart is hidden sorrow that the eye can’t see.”³⁶ For when you bring the Savior’s relief to others, you will find it for yourselves, taught President Camille N. Johnson.³⁷

Divine Promises

Now, return with me to the sacrament meeting where we witnessed



Ecuador

the miracle of Holly Porter’s family being succored by the Lord.³⁸ On the stand while pondering what I might say to offer comfort to this remarkable family and their friends, this thought came: “Use the Savior’s words.”³⁹ So I close today as I did on that Sabbath, with His words, “which healeth the wounded soul.”⁴⁰

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”⁴¹

“I will also ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs, even while you are in bondage; . . . that ye may know of a surety that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions.”⁴²

“I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.”⁴³

My Witness

With joyful reverence, I witness our Savior lives and “His promises are sure.”⁴⁴ Especially for you who are troubled or who are “afflicted in any manner,”⁴⁵ I testify that our Heavenly Father hears your tearful pleadings⁴⁶ and will always respond in perfect wisdom.⁴⁷ “May God grant unto you,”

as He has done for our family in times of great need, “that your burdens may be light,”⁴⁸ even “swallowed up in the joy of Christ.”⁴⁹ In the holy name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Mark 10:52; emphasis added.
2. Mark 8:25.
3. 2 Corinthians 12:8; emphasis added.
4. See Psalm 130:5.
5. 1 Nephi 11:17.
6. Helaman 12:2; see also 2 Nephi 26:24.
7. See Abraham 2:8.
8. Doctrine and Covenants 121:7.
9. 2 Nephi 2:2.
10. Orson F. Whitney, in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (2006), 16.
11. 2 Corinthians 12:9–10.
12. See Abraham 3:25–26.
13. Hebrews 5:8; 2:10.
14. 1 Nephi 20:10; emphasis added.
15. See 2 Nephi 4:19–35.
16. Personal conversation with Elder Russell M. Nelson, Apr. 2011.
17. Russell M. Nelson, “Think Celestial!,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2023, 118.
18. D. Todd Christofferson, “The Refining Fire of Affliction,” *Liahona*, Mar. 2022, 7; emphasis added.
19. See Russell M. Nelson, “Let God Prevail,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2020, 94.
20. Doctrine and Covenants 6:36.
21. Russell M. Nelson, “Think Celestial!,” 118.
22. Russell M. Nelson, “Think Celestial!,” 117. President Jeffrey R. Holland taught: “When you struggle, when you are rejected, when you are spit upon and cast out and made a hiss and a byword, you are standing with the best life this world has ever known,

- the only pure and perfect life ever lived. You have reason to stand tall and be grateful that the Living Son of the Living God knows all about your sorrows and afflictions” (“Missionary Work and the Atonement,” *Ensign*, Mar. 2001, 15).
23. Russell M. Nelson, “Think Celestial!,” 117; see also Alma 7:11–12.
 24. John 16:33.
 25. See 2 Nephi 31:20; Ether 12:4; Moroni 7:48.
 26. Linda S. Reeves, “Worthy of Our Promised Blessings,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2015, 11.
 27. Russell M. Nelson, “Think Celestial!,” 118.
 28. Joseph Smith, letter to Presendia Huntington Buell, Mar. 15, 1839, josephsmithpapers.org.
 29. See Russell M. Nelson, “Joy and Spiritual Survival,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2016, 81–84.
 30. See Mark 14:35–41.
 31. Hebrews 12:2.
 32. Mosiah 15:7.
 33. Alma 31:38; see also Psalm 30:5; John 15:10–11; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; Joseph Smith Translation, James 1:2 (in James 1:2, footnote *a*); 2 Nephi 2:25; 9:18; Alma 26:6–7, 11, 27, 37; 28:8; 33:23; 36:20–21; Doctrine and Covenants 109:76; Moses 5:10–11.
 34. “Just as the Savior offers peace that ‘passeth all understanding’ [Philippians 4:7], He also offers an intensity, depth, and breadth of joy that defy human logic or mortal comprehension. For example, it doesn’t seem possible to feel joy when your child suffers with an incurable illness or when you lose your job or when your spouse betrays you. Yet that is precisely the joy the Savior offers. His joy is constant, assuring us that our ‘afflictions shall be but a small moment’ [Doctrine and Covenants 121:7] and be consecrated to our gain” (Russell M.



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

Covenants and Responsibilities

The Church of Jesus Christ is known as a church that emphasizes making covenants with God.

- Nelson, “Joy and Spiritual Survival,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2016, 82).
35. See Mosiah 24:14; Alma 33:23. Last year, Jill and I met Paula, a beautiful young Guatemalan woman who was struggling mightily with cancer. Her response to my question of how she was feeling left an unforgettable memory in our minds and hearts: “I am grateful,” this humble teenager quietly responded almost in a whisper, “that the Lord gave it to me and not to my sister.” Then, although she was not feeling well, she, her sister, Sariah; and their father went on two ministering visits to two elderly widows with great personal needs and challenges of their own.
 36. “Lord, I Would Follow Thee,” *Hymns*, no. 220.
 37. See Camille N. Johnson, “Jesus Christ Is Relief,” *Liahona*, May 2023, 81; see also Luke 23:34, 43; John 19:26–27. Elder Neal A. Maxwell shared this beautiful insight, urging that “when, for the moment, we ourselves are not being stretched on a particular cross, we ought to be at the foot of someone else’s—full of empathy and proffering spiritual refreshment” (“Endure It Well,” *Ensign*, May 1990, 34).
 38. See Alma 7:12.
 39. See Dallin H. Oaks, “The Teachings of Jesus Christ,” *Liahona*, May 2023, 102–5.
 40. Jacob 2:8; see also Neil L. Andersen, “Wounded,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 83–86.
 41. Matthew 11:28; see also Matthew 28:20: “And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”
 42. Mosiah 24:14.
 43. John 14:18.
 44. “I Am a Child of God,” *Children’s Songbook*, 3; see also Doctrine and Covenants 98:3.
 45. 3 Nephi 17:7; see also Alma 36:3, 27.
 46. See Exodus 2:24; 3:7; Mosiah 24:12.
 47. See 2 Nephi 2:24; Mosiah 4:9; Isaiah 55:9. “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*” (Jeffrey R. Holland, “An High Priest of Good Things to Come,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 38).
 48. Alma 33:23.
 49. Alma 31:38; see also Psalm 30:5; John 15:10–11; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; Joseph Smith Translation, James 1:2 (in James 1:2, footnote a); 2 Nephi 2:25; 9:18; Alma 26:6–7, 11, 27, 37; 28:8; 33:23; 36:20–21; Doctrine and Covenants 109:76; Moses 5:10–11.

“How does your Church differ from others?” My answer to this important question has varied as I have matured and as the Church has grown. When I was born in Utah in 1932, our Church membership was only about 700,000, clustered mostly in Utah and nearby states. At that time, we had only 7 temples. Today the membership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints numbers more than 17 million in about 170 nations. As of this April 1, we have 189 dedicated

temples in many nations and 146 more in planning and construction. I have felt to speak about the purpose of these temples and the history and role of covenants in our worship. This will supplement the inspired teachings of earlier speakers.

- I. A covenant is a commitment to fulfill certain responsibilities. Personal commitments are essential to the regulation of our individual lives and



Ecuador



Madagascar

to the functioning of society. This idea is currently being challenged. A vocal minority oppose institutional authority and insist that persons should be free from any restrictions that limit their individual freedom. Yet we know from millennia of experience that persons give up some individual freedoms to gain the advantages of living in organized communities. Such relinquishments of individual freedoms are principally based on commitments or covenants, expressed or implied.

Here are some examples of covenant responsibilities in our society: (1) judges, (2) military, (3) medical personnel, and (4) firefighters. All of those involved in these familiar occupations make a commitment—often formalized by oath or covenant—to perform their assigned duties. The same is true of our full-time missionaries. Distinctive clothing or name tags are intended to signify that the wearer is under covenant and therefore has a duty to teach and serve and should be supported in that service. A related purpose is to remind the wearers of their covenant

responsibilities. There is no magic in their distinctive clothing or symbols, only a needed reminder of the special responsibilities the wearers have assumed. This is also true of the symbols of the engagement and wedding rings and their role in giving notice to observers or reminding wearers of covenant responsibilities.

II.

What I have said about covenants being a foundation for the regulation of individual lives applies particularly to religious covenants. The foundation and history of many religious affiliations and requirements are based on covenants. For example, the Abrahamic covenant is fundamental to several great religious traditions. It introduces the holy idea of God's covenant promises with His children. The Old Testament frequently refers to God's covenant with Abraham and his seed.¹

The first part of the Book of Mormon, which was written during the Old Testament period, clearly demonstrates the role of covenants in the Israelite history and worship.

Nephi was told that the Israelite writings of that period were “a record of the Jews, which contains the covenants of the Lord, which he hath made unto the house of Israel.”² The books of Nephi make frequent reference to the Abrahamic covenant³ and to Israel as “the covenant people of the Lord.”⁴ The practice of covenanting with God or religious leaders is also recorded in the Book of Mormon writings about Nephi, Joseph in Egypt, King Benjamin, Alma, and Captain Moroni.⁵

III.

When the time came for the Restoration of the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, God called a prophet, Joseph Smith. We do not know the full content of the angel Moroni's early instructions to this maturing young prophet. We do know he told Joseph that “God had a work for [him] to do” and that “the fulness of the everlasting Gospel” must be brought forth, including “the promises made to the fathers.”⁶ We also know that the scriptures young Joseph read most intensively—even before he was directed to organize a church—were the many teachings about covenants he was translating in the Book of Mormon. That book is the Restoration's major source for the fulness of the gospel, including God's plan for His children, and the Book of Mormon is filled with references to covenants.

Being well read in the Bible, Joseph must have known of the book of Hebrews' reference to the Savior's intent to “make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.”⁷ Hebrews also refers to Jesus as “the mediator of the new covenant.”⁸ Significantly, the biblical account of the Savior's

mortal ministry is titled “The New Testament,” a virtual synonym for “The New Covenant.”

Covenants were foundational in the Restoration of the gospel. This is evident in the earliest steps the Lord directed the Prophet to take in organizing His Church. As soon as the Book of Mormon was published, the Lord directed the organization of His restored Church, soon to be named The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.⁹ Revelation recorded in April 1830 directs that persons “shall be received by baptism into his church” after they “witness” (which means solemnly testify) “that they have truly repented of all their sins, and are willing to take upon them the name of Jesus Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end.”¹⁰

This same revelation directs that the Church “meet together often to partake of bread and wine [water] in the remembrance of the Lord Jesus.” The importance of this ordinance is evident in the words of covenants specified for the elder or priest who officiates. He blesses the emblems of the bread for “the souls of all those who partake of it . . . , that they . . . witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given them.”¹¹

The central role of covenants in the newly restored Church was reaffirmed in the preface the Lord gave for the first publication of His revelations. There the Lord declares that He has called Joseph Smith because the inhabitants of the earth “have strayed from mine ordinances, and have broken mine everlasting covenant.”¹² This revelation further explains that His commandments are being given “that



Guatemala

mine everlasting covenant might be established.”¹³

Today we understand the role of covenants in the restored Church and the worship of its members. President Gordon B. Hinckley gave this summary of the effect of our baptism and our weekly partaking of the sacrament: “Every member of this church who has entered the waters of baptism has become a party to a sacred covenant. Each time we partake of the sacrament of the Lord’s supper, we renew that covenant.”¹⁴

We have been reminded by many speakers at this conference that President Russell M. Nelson often refers to the plan of salvation as the “covenant path” that “leads us back to [God]” and “is all about our relationship with God.”¹⁵ He teaches about the significance of covenants in our temple ceremonies and urges us to see the end from the beginning and to “think celestial.”¹⁶

IV.

Now I speak more of temple covenants. In fulfillment of his responsibility to restore the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Prophet Joseph Smith spent much of his final years directing the construction of a temple in Nauvoo, Illinois. Through him the Lord revealed sacred

teachings, doctrine, and covenants for his successors to administer in temples. There persons who were endowed were to be taught God’s plan of salvation and invited to make sacred covenants. Those who lived faithful to those covenants were promised eternal life, wherein “all things are theirs” and they “shall dwell in the presence of God and his Christ forever and ever.”¹⁷

The endowment ceremonies in the Nauvoo Temple were administered just before our early pioneers were expelled to begin their historic trek to the mountains in the West. We have the testimonies of many pioneers that the power they received from being bound to Christ in their endowments in the Nauvoo Temple gave them the strength to make their epic journey and establish themselves in the West.¹⁸

Persons who have been endowed in a temple are responsible to wear a temple garment, an article of clothing not visible because it is worn beneath outer clothing. It reminds endowed members of the sacred covenants they have made and the blessings they have been promised in the holy temple. To achieve those holy purposes, we are instructed to wear temple garments continuously, with the only exceptions being those obviously necessary. Because covenants

do not “take a day off,” to remove one’s garments can be understood as a disclaimer of the covenant responsibilities and blessings to which they relate. In contrast, persons who wear their garments faithfully and keep their temple covenants continually affirm their role as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is constructing temples all over the world. Their purpose is to bless the covenant children of God with temple worship and with the sacred responsibilities and powers and unique blessings of being bound to Christ they receive by covenant.

The Church of Jesus Christ is known as a church that emphasizes making covenants with God. Covenants are inherent in each of the ordinances of salvation and exaltation this restored Church administers. The ordinance of baptism and its associated covenants are requirements for entrance into the celestial kingdom. The ordinances and associated covenants of the temple are requirements for exaltation in the celestial kingdom, which is eternal life, “the greatest of all the gifts of God.”¹⁹ That is the focus of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

I testify of Jesus Christ, who is the head of that Church, and invoke His blessings on all who seek to keep their sacred covenants. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See, for example, Genesis 17:2–9; Exodus 6:2–4; 19:5–6; Leviticus 26:42; see also 2 Nephi 9:1.
2. 1 Nephi 13:23.
3. See 1 Nephi 15:18; 17:40; 22:9; 2 Nephi 29:14.
4. See, for example, 1 Nephi 14:14; 2 Nephi 6:13; 9:1.
5. See 2 Nephi 1:5; 3:4; 31:7, 13, 14; Mosiah 5:5–8; 6:1; Alma 7:15; 46:21–22.
6. Joseph Smith—History 1:33–34, 39.
7. Hebrews 8:8.



Madagascar

8. Hebrews 12:24. This same description appears in Doctrine and Covenants 76:69.
9. See Doctrine and Covenants 115:4.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 20:37; see also Mosiah 18:10–13.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 20:75, 77.
12. Doctrine and Covenants 1:15.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 1:22.
14. Gordon B. Hinckley, “God Is at the Helm,” *Ensign*, May 1994, 53.
15. Russell M. Nelson, “As We Go Forward Together,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Apr. 2018, 7; Russell M. Nelson, “The Everlasting

- Covenant,” *Liahona*, Oct. 2022, 5, 11. Also see Nephi’s use of the metaphor of walking in the “path”: 2 Nephi 4:32; 33:9.
16. See Russell M. Nelson, “Think Celestial!,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2023, 117–20.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 76:59, 62.
18. See Church History Topics, “Nauvoo Temple,” Gospel Library.
19. Doctrine and Covenants 14:7.



By Elder D. Todd Christofferson
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

The Testimony of Jesus

My invitation is to act now to secure your place as one who is valiant in the testimony of Jesus.

In 1832, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon received a remarkable vision concerning the eternal destiny of God’s children. This revelation spoke of three heavenly kingdoms. President Dallin H. Oaks spoke about these “kingdoms of glory” last October,¹ noting that “through the triumph and the glory of the Lamb,”² all but a relatively few individuals are eventually redeemed into one of these kingdoms, “according to the desires manifested through their choices.”³ God’s plan of redemption constitutes a universal opportunity for all His children, whenever and wherever they may have lived on the earth.

While the glory of even the least of the three kingdoms, the telestial, “surpasses all understanding,”⁴ our Father’s hope is that we will choose—and, through the grace of His Son, qualify for—the highest and most glorious of these kingdoms, the celestial, where we may enjoy eternal life as “joint-heirs with Christ.”⁵ President Russell M. Nelson has urged us to “think celestial,” making the celestial kingdom our eternal goal and then “carefully considering where each of [our] decisions while here on earth will place [us] in the next world.”⁶

Those in the celestial kingdom are “they who received the testimony of Jesus, . . . who are just men made perfect through Jesus the mediator of the new covenant.”⁷ The inhabitants of

the second, or terrestrial, kingdom are described as essentially good, including the “honorable men of the earth, who were blinded by the craftiness of men.” Their principal limiting trait is that they “are not valiant in the testimony of Jesus.”⁸ By contrast, those in the lower, telestial kingdom are those who “received not the gospel, neither the testimony of Jesus.”⁹

Note that the distinguishing characteristic for the inhabitants of each kingdom is how they relate to “the testimony of Jesus,” ranging from (1) wholehearted devotion to (2) not being valiant to (3) outright rejection. On each person’s reaction hangs his or her eternal future.

I.

What is the testimony of Jesus?

It is the witness of the Holy Spirit that He is the divine Son of God, the Messiah and Redeemer. It is John’s testimony that Jesus was in the beginning with God, that He is the Creator of heaven and earth, and that “in him was the gospel, and the gospel was the life, and the life was the light of men.”¹⁰ It is “the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, . . . that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven.”¹¹ It is the knowledge that “there is no other name given whereby salvation cometh.”¹² It is the “testimony, last of all,” given by the



Chile

Prophet Joseph Smith, “that he lives! . . . That he is the Only Begotten of the Father—that by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God.”¹³

II.

Beyond this testimony is the question, What do we do about it?

The inheritors of the celestial kingdom “receive” the testimony of Jesus in the fullest sense by being baptized, receiving the Holy Ghost, and overcoming by faith.¹⁴ The principles and truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ govern their priorities and choices.



Kenya

The testimony of Jesus is manifest in what they are and what they are becoming. Their motive is charity, “the pure love of Christ.”¹⁵ Their focus is on pursuing “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”¹⁶

At least some of those who will be found in the terrestrial kingdom also accept the testimony of Jesus, but they are distinguished by what they *don't* do about it. Not being valiant in the witness of the Savior suggests a degree of apathy or casualness—being “lukewarm”¹⁷—as opposed to the people of Ammon in the Book of Mormon, for example, who were “distinguished for their zeal towards God.”¹⁸

The inhabitants of the telestial kingdom are those who reject the testimony of Jesus along with His gospel, His covenants, and His prophets. They are described by Abinadi as “having gone according to their own carnal wills and desires; having

never called upon the Lord while the arms of mercy were extended towards them; for the arms of mercy were extended towards them, and they would not.”¹⁹

III.

What does it mean to be valiant in the testimony of Jesus?

There are several possibilities that could be considered in answering this question. I will mention a few. Being valiant in the testimony of Jesus surely includes nurturing and strengthening that testimony. True disciples do not ignore the seemingly small things that sustain and strengthen their testimony of Jesus, such as prayer, study of the scriptures, Sabbath observance, partaking of the sacrament, repentance, ministering, and worship in the house of the Lord. President Nelson reminds us that “with frightening speed, a testimony that is not nourished daily ‘by the

good word of God’ [Moroni 6:4] can crumble. Thus, . . . we need daily experiences worshipping the Lord and studying His gospel.” Then he added: “I plead with you to let God prevail in your life. Give Him a fair share of your time. As you do, notice what happens to your positive spiritual momentum.”²⁰

Being valiant also suggests being open and public about one’s witness. In baptism, we confirm our willingness “to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that [we] may be in, even until death.”²¹ In this Easter season especially, we joyfully, publicly, and unreservedly proclaim our witness of the resurrected, living Christ.

One aspect of being valiant in the testimony of Jesus is to heed His messengers. God does not force us into the better path, the covenant path, but He instructs His prophets to make us fully aware of the consequences

of our choices. And it is not just the members of His Church. Through His prophets and apostles, He lovingly pleads with all the world to heed the truth that will make them free,²² spare them needless suffering, and bring them enduring joy.

Being valiant in the testimony of Jesus means encouraging others, by word and example, to likewise be valiant, especially those of our own families. Elder Neal A. Maxwell once addressed “the essentially ‘honorable’ members [of the Church] who are skimming over the surface instead of deepening their discipleship and who are casually engaged rather than ‘anxiously engaged’ [Doctrine and Covenants 76:75; 58:27].”²³ Noting that all are free to choose, Elder Maxwell lamented: “Unfortunately, however, when some choose slackness, they are choosing not only for themselves, but for the next generation and the next. Small equivocations in parents can produce large deviations in their children! Earlier generations in a family may have reflected dedication, while some in the current generation evidence equivocation. Sadly, in the next, some may choose dissension, as erosion takes its toll.”²⁴

Years ago, Elder John H. Groberg related the story of a young family living in a small branch in Hawaii in the early 1900s. They had been members of the Church for about two years when one of their daughters fell ill with an undiagnosed disease and was hospitalized. At church the next Sunday, the father and his son prepared the sacrament as they did most weeks, but as the young father knelt to bless the bread, the branch president, suddenly realizing who was at the sacrament table, jumped up and cried, “Stop. You can’t touch the sacrament. Your daughter has

an unknown disease. Leave immediately while someone else fixes new sacrament bread. We can’t have you here. Go.” The stunned father searchingly looked at the branch president and then the congregation and, sensing the depth of anxiety and embarrassment from all, motioned to his family, and they quietly filed out of the chapel.

Not a word was said as, dejectedly, the family walked along the trail to their small home. There they sat in a circle, and the father said, “Please be silent until I am ready to speak.” The young son wondered what they would do to get revenge for the shame they had suffered: would they kill the branch president’s pigs, or burn his house, or join another church? Five, ten, fifteen, twenty-five minutes passed in silence.

The father’s clenched fists began to relax, and tears formed. The mother began to cry, and soon each of the children was quietly weeping. The father turned to his wife and said, “I love you,” and then repeated those words to each of their children. “I love all of you and I want us to be together, forever, as a family. And the only way that can be is for all of us to be good members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and be sealed by the holy priesthood in the temple. This is not the branch president’s church. It is the Church of Jesus Christ. We will not allow any man or any hurt or embarrassment or pride to keep us from being together forever. Next Sunday we will go back to church. We will stay by ourselves until our daughter’s sickness is known, but we will go back.”

They did go back, their daughter recovered, and the family was sealed in the Laie Hawaii Temple when it was completed. Today,

well over 100 souls call their father, grandfather, and great-grandfather blessed because he kept his eyes on eternity.²⁵

One last aspect of being valiant in the testimony of Jesus that I will mention is our individual pursuit of personal holiness. Jesus is our essential Redeemer,²⁶ and He pleads, “Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day.”²⁷

The prophet Mormon describes one group of Saints who persevered in this manner despite having “to wade through much affliction”:²⁸

“Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God.”²⁹ It is this mighty change of heart—yielding our hearts to God and being spiritually reborn through the grace of the Savior—that we seek.³⁰

My invitation is to act now to secure your place as one who is valiant in the testimony of Jesus. As repentance may be needed, “do not procrastinate the day of your repentance,”³¹ lest “in an hour when ye think not the summer shall be past, and the harvest ended, and your souls not saved.”³² Be zealous in keeping your covenants with God. Do not be “offended [by] the strictness of the word.”³³ “Remember to retain the name [of Christ] written always in your hearts, . . . that ye [may] hear and know *the voice* by

which ye shall be called, and also, *the name* by which he shall call you.”³⁴ And finally, “settle this in your hearts, that ye will do the things which [Jesus] shall teach, and command you.”³⁵

Our Father wants all His children who will to enjoy eternal life with Him in His celestial kingdom. Jesus suffered, died, and was resurrected to make that possible. He “hath ascended into heaven, and hath sat down on the right hand of God, to claim of the Father his rights of mercy which he hath upon the children of men.”³⁶ I pray that we may all be blessed with a burning testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ, rejoice and be valiant in that testimony, and enjoy the fruits of His grace in our lives continually. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Kingdoms of Glory,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2023, 26–29.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 76:39.
3. Dallin H. Oaks, “Kingdoms of Glory,” 26.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 76:89.
5. Romans 8:17.
6. Russell M. Nelson, “Think Celestial!,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2023, 118.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 76:51, 69; emphasis added.
8. Doctrine and Covenants 76:75, 79; emphasis added.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 76:101; emphasis added.
10. Joseph Smith Translation, John 1:4 (in the Bible appendix); see also John 1:1–3.
11. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2011), 49.
12. Mosiah 5:8.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 76:22–24. The testimony of Jesus comes by the Holy Ghost, the spirit of prophecy and revelation (see Revelation 19:10; *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 384–85).
14. See Doctrine and Covenants 76:51–53.
15. Moroni 7:47.
16. Ephesians 4:13.
17. See Revelation 3:15–16.
18. Alma 27:27.
19. Mosiah 16:12.
20. Russell M. Nelson, “The Power of Spiritual Momentum,” *Liahona*, May 2022, 99.
21. Mosiah 18:9.



HE COMES AGAIN TO RULE AND REIGN. BY MARY R. SAUER

22. See John 8:31–32.
23. Neal A. Maxwell, “Settle This in Your Hearts,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, 65. In addition to these remarks by Elder Maxwell, other general conference speakers in recent years have addressed this subject, including Quentin L. Cook (“Valiant in the Testimony of Jesus,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2016, 40–44) and Rebecca L. Craven (“Careful versus Casual,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2019, 9–11).
24. Neal A. Maxwell, “Settle This in Your Hearts,” 65–66.
25. See John H. Groberg, “Writing Your Personal and Family History,” *Ensign*, May 1980, 48–49.
26. “He hath power given unto him from the Father to redeem [us] from [our] sins because of repentance; therefore he hath sent his angels to declare the [glad] tidings of the conditions of repentance, which bringeth unto the power of the Redeemer,

- unto the salvation of [our] souls” (Helaman 5:11). See also Helaman 5:10: Jesus redeems us *from* our sins, not *in* our sins.
27. 3 Nephi 27:20; see also verses 16–21; 3 Nephi 11:31–36.
28. Helaman 3:34.
29. Helaman 3:35.
30. See Mosiah 5:7; 27:24–31; Alma 5:11–15, 26; Moses 6:59–60.
31. Alma 34:33.
32. Doctrine and Covenants 45:2; see also Helaman 13:38.
33. Alma 35:15.
34. Mosiah 5:12; emphasis added.
35. Joseph Smith Translation, Luke 14:28 (in Luke 14:27, footnote b).
36. Moroni 7:27.



By Elder Taylor G. Godoy
Of the Seventy

Call, Don't Fall

If we call out to God, I testify we will not fall.

Today I would like to begin by testifying of the complete certainty within my heart that God hears our prayers and answers them in a personalized way.

In a world going through times of uncertainty, pain, disappointment, and heartbreak, we might feel inclined to rely more on personal abilities and preferences, as well as the knowledge and security that come from the world. This could cause us to put in the background the real source of succor and support that can counter the challenges of this mortal life.

I remember an occasion when I was hospitalized for an illness, and it was difficult for me to sleep. When I turned off the lights and the room became dark, I saw a reflective sign on the ceiling in front of me that said, "Call, don't fall." To my surprise, the next day I observed the same message repeated in several parts of the room.

Why was that message so important? When I asked the nurse about it, she said, "It is to prevent a blow that might increase the pain you already have."

This life, by its nature, brings painful experiences, some inherent to our physical bodies, some due to our weaknesses or afflictions, some due to the way others use their agency, and some due to our use of agency.

Is there a promise more powerful than the one the Savior Himself made when He declared, "Ask, and it shall

be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock," or call, "and it shall be opened unto you"?¹

Prayer is the means of communication with our Heavenly Father that allows us to "call and don't fall." However, there are circumstances in which we might think that the call has not been heard because we do not receive an immediate response or one according to our expectations.

This sometimes leads to anxiety, sadness, or disappointment. But remember Nephi's expression of faith in the Lord when he said, "How is it that he cannot instruct me, that I should build a ship?"² Now, I ask you, how is it that the Lord cannot instruct you, that you do not fall?

Confidence in God's answers implies accepting that His ways are not our ways³ and that "all things must come to pass in their time."⁴

The certainty of knowing that we are children of a loving and merciful Heavenly Father should be the motivation to "call" in devout prayer with an attitude of "pray[ing] always, and not faint[ing]; . . . that [our] performance may be for the welfare of [our] soul[s]."⁵ Imagine the feelings of Heavenly Father when in each prayer we make a supplication in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ. What power and tenderness, I believe, are displayed when we do so!

The scriptures are full of examples of those who called out to God so

they would not fall. Helaman and his army, while facing their afflictions, called upon God, pouring out their souls in prayer. They received assurance, peace, faith, and hope, gaining courage and determination until they achieved their goal.⁶

Imagine how Moses would have called and cried out to God when finding himself between the Red Sea and the Egyptians approaching to attack, or Abraham when obeying the mandate to sacrifice his son Isaac.

I am certain that each of you have had and will have experiences where calling will be the answer to not fall.

Thirty years ago, while my wife and I were preparing for our civil marriage and our temple marriage, we received a call informing us that civil marriages were canceled due to a strike. We received the call three days before the scheduled ceremony. After several attempts at other offices and not finding available appointments, we began to feel distressed and doubtful that we really could get married as planned.

My fiancée and I "called," pouring out our souls to God in prayer. Finally, someone told us about an office in a small town on the outskirts of the city where an acquaintance was the mayor. Without hesitation, we went to visit him and asked him if it would be possible to marry us. To our joy, he agreed. His secretary emphasized to us that we had to obtain a certificate in that city and deliver all the documents before noon the next day.

The next day, we moved to the small town and went to the police station to request the required document. To our surprise, the officer said that he would not give it to us because many young couples had been running away from their families to get

married secretly in that town, which of course was not our case. Again, fear and sadness overtook us.

I remember how I silently called out to my Heavenly Father so as not to fall. I received a clear impression in my mind, repeatedly saying, “Temple recommend, temple recommend.” I immediately took out my temple recommend and handed it to the officer, to my fiancée’s bewilderment.

What a surprise we had when we heard the officer say, “Why didn’t you tell me that you are from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? I know your church well.” He immediately began to prepare the document. We were even more surprised when the officer left the station without saying anything.

Fifty minutes passed, and he did not return. It was already 11:55 in the morning, and we had only until noon to deliver the papers. Suddenly he appeared with a beautiful puppy and told us it was a wedding gift and gave it to us along with the document.

We ran toward the mayor’s office with our document and our new dog. Then we saw an official vehicle coming toward us. I stopped in front of it. The vehicle stopped, and we saw the secretary inside. Seeing us, she said, “I’m sorry; I told you noon. I must go on another errand.”

I humbled myself in silence, calling with all my heart to my Heavenly Father, asking for help once again to “not fall.” Suddenly, the miracle happened. The secretary said to us, “What a beautiful dog you have. Where could I find one like that for my son?”

“It is for you,” we immediately replied.

The secretary looked at us with surprise and said, “OK, let’s go to the office and make the arrangements.”



Japan

Two days later, Carol and I were married civilly, as planned, and then we were sealed in the Lima Peru Temple.

Of course, we need to remember that calling is a matter of faith and action—faith to recognize that we have a Heavenly Father who answers our prayers according to His infinite wisdom, and then action consistent with what we asked for. Praying—calling—can be a sign of our hope. But taking action after praying is a sign that our faith is real—faith that is tested in moments of pain, fear, or disappointment.

I suggest you consider the following:

1. Always think of the Lord as your first option for help.
2. Call, don't fall. Turn to God in sincere prayer.
3. After praying, do all you can to obtain the blessings you prayed for.
4. Humble yourselves to accept the answer in His time and His way.
5. Don't stop! Keep moving forward on the covenant path while you wait for an answer.

Perhaps there is someone right now who, due to circumstances, feels like they are about to fall and would like to call like Joseph Smith did when he cried out: "O God, where art thou? . . . How long shall thy hand be stayed?"⁷

Even in circumstances such as these, pray with "spiritual momentum," as President Russell M. Nelson taught,⁸ because your prayers are always heard!

Remember this hymn:

*Ere you left your room this morning,
Did you think to pray?
In the name of Christ, our Savior,*



United Kingdom

*Did you sue for loving favor
As a shield today?*

*Oh, how praying rests the weary!
Prayer will change the night to day.
So, when life gets dark and dreary,
Don't forget to pray.⁹*

As we pray we can feel the embrace of our Heavenly Father, who sent His Only Begotten Son to relieve our burdens, because if we call out to God, I testify we will not fall. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Matthew 7:7.
2. 1 Nephi 17:51.

3. See Isaiah 55:8.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 64:32.
5. 2 Nephi 32:9.
6. See Alma 58:10–11.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 121:1–2.
8. See Russell M. Nelson, "The Power of Spiritual Momentum," *Liahona*, May 2022, 97–100.
9. "Did You Think to Pray?," *Hymns*, no. 140.



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

Bridging the Two Great Commandments

Our ability to follow Jesus Christ depends upon our strength and power to live the first and second commandments with balance and equal devotion.

Introduction

As my wife, Lesa, and I travel on assignment throughout the world, we relish the privilege of meeting with you in congregations large and small. Your devotion to the work of the Lord buoys us up and stands as a testimony to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We return home from each trip wondering if we possibly gave as much as we received.

When traveling, we have little time for sightseeing. However, when possible, I spend a few moments in a particular passion. I have an interest in architecture and design and a special fascination with bridges. Suspension bridges amaze me. Whether it's the Rainbow Bridge in Tokyo, the Tsing Ma Bridge in Hong Kong, the Tower Bridge in London, or others I have seen, I marvel at the engineering genius built within these complicated structures. Bridges take us places we otherwise would not be able to go. (Before I continue, I note that since this message was prepared, a tragic bridge accident occurred in Baltimore. We mourn the loss of life and offer condolences to affected families.)

A Magnificent Suspension Bridge

Recently, a conference assignment took me to California, where I once again crossed the iconic Golden Gate Bridge, regarded as an engineering wonder of the world. This monumental structure intertwines beautiful form, functional purpose, and masterful engineering. It is a classic

suspension bridge with bookend towers, supported by massive piers. The colossal, majestic weight-bearing twin towers soaring above the ocean were the first elements to be constructed. Together they shoulder the load of the sweeping main suspension cables and the vertical suspender cables, which cradle the roadway below. The extraordinary stabilizing capacity—the power of the tower—is the magic behind the engineering of the bridge.

Early construction images of the bridge bear testimony of this engineering principle. Each bridge element finds weight-bearing support from the symmetrical towers, both interdependently connected one to another.

When the bridge is complete, with its two powerful towers firmly in place and piers anchored in a foundation of bedrock, it is an image of strength and beauty.



For any suspension bridge to do what it was built to do, its towers must function together in complete harmony. The power of the towers is the magic behind the engineering of the bridge.

GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE DISTRICT

Today I invite you to look at this stately bridge—with its ascending twin towers built on a strong foundation—through a gospel lens.

In the twilight of Jesus Christ's ministry, during what we now call Holy Week, a Pharisee who was a lawyer¹ asked the Savior a question he knew was nearly impossible to answer:² "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" The lawyer, "tempting him" and seeking a legalistic answer, with seemingly deceitful intent, received a genuine, sacred, divine response.

"Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

"This is the first and great commandment." Harkening to our bridge analogy, the first tower!

"And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." This is the second tower!

"On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."³ The remaining elements of the bridge!

Let's examine each of the two great commandments, revealed and recited in Jesus Christ's response. As we do so, let the image of the magnificent suspension bridge resonate in your mind's eye.

Love the Lord

The first, to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and mind.

In this answer, Jesus Christ condenses the essence of the law embodied in the sacred teachings of the Old Testament. To love the Lord centers first on your heart—your very nature. The Lord asks that you love with all your soul⁴—your entire consecrated being—and finally, to love with all your mind—your intelligence and intellect. Love for God is not limited or finite. It is infinite and eternal.

For me, the application of the first great commandment can sometimes feel abstract, even daunting. Gratefully, as I consider further words of Jesus, this commandment becomes much more graspable: "If ye love me, keep my commandments."⁵ This I can do. I can love Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, which then leads to prayer, scripture study, and temple worship. We love the Father and the Son through the payment of tithes, keeping the Sabbath day holy, living a virtuous and chaste life, and being obedient.

Loving the Lord is often measured in small daily deeds, footsteps on the covenant path: for young people, using social media to build up rather than tear down; leaving the party, movie, or activity where standards might be challenged; showing reverence for things sacred.

Consider this tender example. It was fast Sunday as Vance⁶ and I knocked on the door of a small, humble home. We and other deacons in the quorum had come to expect the words "Please come in," yelled warmly in a thick German accent loud enough to hear through the door. Sister Mueller was one of several immigrant widows in the ward. She couldn't answer the door very easily, as she was legally blind. As we stepped inside the dimly lit home, she greeted us with kind questions: What are your names? How are you doing? Do you love the Lord? We answered and shared that we came to receive her fast offering. Even at our young age, her meager circumstances were readily apparent, and her faith-filled response was profoundly touching: "I placed a dime on the counter earlier this morning. I am so grateful to offer my fast offering. Would you be kind enough to place it in the



GETTY IMAGES/UNDERWOOD ARCHIVES

Like the bookend towers of a suspension bridge, our ability to follow Jesus Christ depends upon our strength and power to live the first and second commandments with balance and devotion to both.

envelope and fill out my fast-offering receipt?” Her love of the Lord lifted our faith each time we left her home.

King Benjamin promised remarkable power for those who follow the first great commandment. “I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments. . . . They are blessed in all things, . . . and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven . . . in a state of never-ending happiness.”⁷

Loving the Lord leads to eternal happiness!

Love Your Neighbor

Jesus then said, “And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”⁸ This is the second tower of the bridge.

Here Jesus bridges our heavenly upward gaze, to love the Lord, with

our earthly outward gaze, to love our fellow men and women. One is interdependent on the other. Love of the Lord is not complete if we neglect our neighbors. This outward love includes all of God’s children without regard to gender, social class, race, sexuality, income, age, or ethnicity. We seek out those who are hurt and broken, the marginalized, for “all are alike unto God.”⁹ We “succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees.”¹⁰

Consider this example: Brother Evans¹¹ was surprised when he was prompted to stop his car and knock on an unknown door of an unknown family. When a widowed mother of over 10 answered the door, their difficult circumstances and great needs became readily apparent to him. The first was simple, paint for

their home, which was followed by many years of temporal and spiritual ministering to this family.

This thankful mother later wrote of her heaven-sent friend: “You have spent your life reaching out to the least of us. How I would love to hear the things the Lord has to say to you as He expresses His appreciation for the good you have done financially and spiritually for the people that only you and He will ever know about. Thank you for blessing us in so many ways, . . . for the missionaries you provided for. . . . I often wonder if the Lord picked on you exclusively or if you were just the one who listened.”

To love your neighbor includes Christlike deeds of kindness and service. Can you let go of grudges, forgive enemies, welcome and minister to your neighbors, and assist the elderly? You will each be



inspired as you build your tower of love for neighbor.

President Russell M. Nelson taught: “Giving help to others—making a conscientious effort to care about others as much as or *more* than we care about ourselves—is our joy. Especially . . . when it is not convenient and when it takes us out of our comfort zone. *Living* that second great commandment is the *key* to becoming a true disciple of Jesus Christ.”¹²

An Interdependency

Jesus further taught, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”¹³ This is very instructive. There is an important interdependency between loving the Lord and loving one another. For the Golden Gate Bridge to perform its designed function, both towers are equally strong and with equal power to bear the weight of the suspension cables, the roadway, and the traffic crossing the bridge. Without this engineering symmetry, the bridge could be compromised, even leading to collapse. For any suspension bridge to do what it was built to do, its towers must function together in complete harmony. Likewise, our ability to follow Jesus Christ depends upon our strength and power to live the first and second commandments with balance and equal devotion to both.

The increasing contention in the world suggests, however, that we at times fail to see or remember this. Some are so focused on keeping the commandments that they show little tolerance of those they see as less righteous. Some find it difficult to love those who are choosing to live their lives outside of the covenant or even away from any religious participation.

Alternatively, there are those who emphasize the importance of loving others without acknowledgment that we are all accountable to God. Some refuse entirely the notion that there is such a thing as absolute truth or right and wrong and believe that the only thing required of us is complete tolerance and acceptance of the choices of others. Either of these imbalances could cause your spiritual bridge to tip or even fall.

President Dallin H. Oaks described this when he said: “We are commanded to love everyone, since Jesus’s parable of the good Samaritan teaches that everyone is our neighbor. But our zeal to keep this second commandment must not cause us to forget the first, to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind.”¹⁴

Conclusion

So the question for each of us is, How do we build our own bridge of faith and devotion—erecting tall bridge towers of both loving God and loving our neighbors? Well, we just start. Our initial efforts might look like a plan on the back of a napkin or an early-stage blueprint of the bridge we hope to construct. It might consist of a few realistic goals to understand the Lord’s gospel more or to vow to judge others less. No one is too young or too old to begin.

Over time, with prayerful and thoughtful planning, rough ideas are refined. New actions become habits. Early drafts become polished blueprints. We build our personal spiritual bridge with hearts and minds devoted to Heavenly Father and His Only Begotten Son as well as to our brothers and sisters with whom we work, play, and live.

In the days ahead, when you pass over a majestic suspension bridge or even when you see a picture, with its soaring towers, I invite you to remember the two great commandments, described by Jesus Christ in the New Testament. May the Lord’s instructions inspire us. May our hearts and minds be lifted upward to love the Lord and turned outward to love our neighbor.

May this strengthen our faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement, of which I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. “In the New Testament, [the term *lawyer* was] equivalent to *scribe*, one who was by profession a student and teacher of the law, including the written law of the Pentateuch, and also ‘the traditions of the elders’ (Matt. 22:35; Mark 12:28; Luke 10:25)” (Bible Dictionary, “Lawyer”).
2. Anciently, Jewish scholars had enumerated 613 commandments in the Torah and actively debated the relative importance of one versus the other. Perhaps the lawyer intended to use Jesus’s answer against Him. If He said one commandment was the most important, it might allow an opening to accuse Jesus of ignoring another aspect of the law. But the Savior’s response silenced those who had come to entrap Him with a foundational statement that today is the bedrock for all we do in the Church.
3. Matthew 22:36–40.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 88:15.
5. John 14:15.
6. Both names changed in this story to protect privacy.
7. Mosiah 2:41.
8. Matthew 22:39.
9. 2 Nephi 26:33.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 81:5.
11. Name changed to protect privacy.
12. Russell M. Nelson, “The Second Great Commandment,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2019, 100.
13. Matthew 22:40.
14. Dallin H. Oaks, “Two Great Commandments,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2019, 73–74.



By Elder Mathias Held
Of the Seventy

Opposition in All Things

To be able to exercise our agency, we need to have opposing options to consider.

Recently, while driving in a city unknown to us, I inadvertently took a wrong turn, which led my wife and me onto an express highway for endless miles without being able to turn around again. We had received a kind invitation to a friend’s home and worried that we would now arrive much later than we were expected to.

While on this highway and desperately looking for a way out again, I blamed myself for not paying better attention to the navigation system. This experience caused me to think about how in our lives we sometimes make wrong decisions and how we must live with the consequences humbly and patiently until we are able to change our course again.

Life is all about making choices. Our Father in Heaven gave us the divine gift of agency precisely so that we could learn from our choices—from the right ones and also from the wrong ones. We correct our wrong choices when we repent. This is where growth happens. Heavenly Father’s plan for all of us is about learning, developing, and progressing toward eternal life.

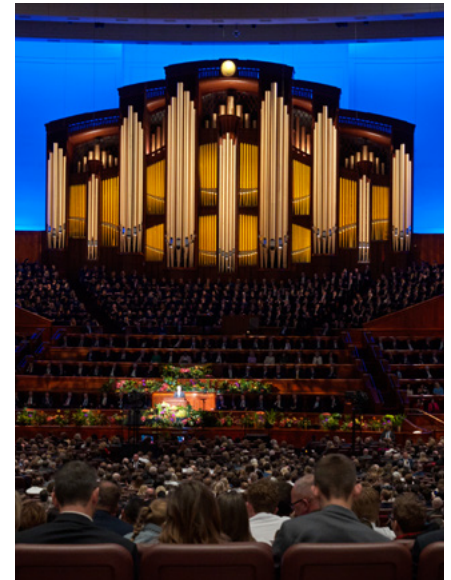
Ever since my wife and I were taught by the missionaries and joined the Church many years ago, I have always been impressed by the profound teachings that Lehi gave to his son Jacob in the Book of Mormon. He taught him that “the Lord God

gave unto man that he should act for himself”¹ and that “it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things.”² To be able to exercise our agency, we need to have opposing options to consider. In doing so, the Book of Mormon also reminds us that we have been “instructed sufficiently”³ and that “the Spirit of Christ”⁴ has been given to every one of us to “know good from evil.”⁵

In life, we constantly confront many important choices. For example:

- Choosing whether or not we will follow God’s commandments.
- Choosing to have faith and recognize when miracles happen or to skeptically wait for something to happen before choosing to believe only then.
- Choosing to develop trust in God or to fearfully anticipate another challenge the next day.

As when I took a wrong turn on that highway, suffering from the consequences of *our own* poor decisions can often be especially painful because we only have ourselves to blame. Nevertheless, we can always choose to receive comfort through the divine process of repentance, make wrong things right again, and in doing so learn some life-changing lessons.

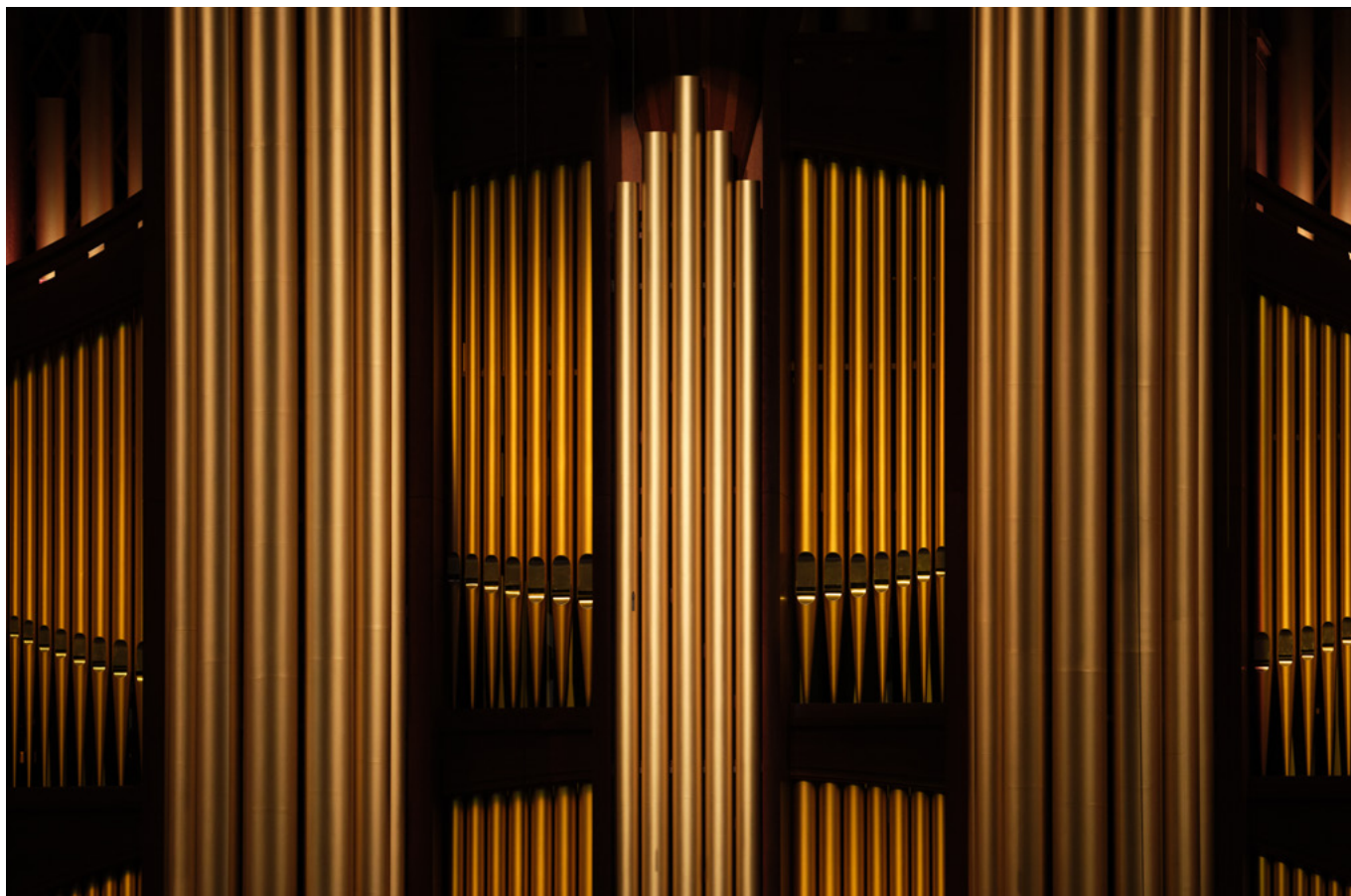


Sometimes we can also experience opposition and trials from things outside of our control, such as:

- Moments of health and periods of sickness.
- Times of peace and times of war.
- Hours of day and of night and seasons of summer and of winter.
- Times of labor followed by times of rest.

Even though we usually cannot choose between these kinds of situations because they just happen, we are still free to choose *how* to react to them. We can do so with a positive or with a pessimistic attitude. We can seek to learn from the experience and ask for our Lord’s help and support, or we can think that we are on our own in this trial and that we must suffer it alone. We can “adjust our sails” to the new reality, or we can decide not to change anything. In the darkness of night, we can turn on our lights. In the cold of winter, we should choose to wear warm clothes. In seasons of sickness, we can seek medical and spiritual help. We choose how to react to these circumstances.

Adjust, learn, seek, choose are all action verbs. Remember that we are agents and not objects. Let us never forget that Jesus promised to “take upon him the pains and sicknesses of his people . . . that he may . . . succor,”



or help, us as we turn to Him.⁶ We can choose to build our foundation on the rock that is Jesus Christ so that when the whirlwind comes, “it shall have no power over [us].”⁷ He has promised that “whosoever will come [to Him], him will [He] receive; and blessed are those who come unto [Him].”⁸

Now, there is one additional principle that is especially important. Lehi said that there “must needs be . . . an opposition *in all things*.”⁹ This means that opposites don’t exist apart from each other. They can even complement each other. We would not be able to identify joy unless we had also experienced sorrow at some point. Feeling hungry at times helps us to be especially grateful when we do have enough to eat again. We would not be able to identify truth unless we had also seen lies here and there.

These opposites are all like the two sides of one same coin. Both sides are always present. Charles Dickens provided an example of this idea when

he wrote that “it was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”¹⁰

Let me give an example from our own life. Getting married, forming a family, and having children brought to us the greatest moments of joy we have ever experienced in our lives but also the most profound moments of pain, anguish, and grief when something happened to any one of us. Infinite joy and bliss with our children were sometimes also followed by recurring periods of sicknesses, hospitalizations, and sleepless nights filled with distress, as well as finding relief in prayers and priesthood blessings. These contrasting experiences taught us that we are never alone in moments of suffering, and they also showed us how much we can carry with the Lord’s succor and help. These experiences helped to shape us in wonderful ways, and it has all been totally worthwhile. Is this not what we came here for?

In the scriptures we also find some interesting examples:

- Lehi taught his son Jacob that the afflictions he suffered in the wilderness helped him know the greatness of God and that “[God] shall consecrate [his] afflictions for [his] gain.”¹¹
- During Joseph Smith’s cruel incarceration in Liberty Jail, the Lord told him that “all these things shall give [him] experience, and shall be for [his] good.”¹²
- Finally, Jesus Christ’s infinite sacrifice was certainly the greatest example of pain and suffering ever seen, but it also brought about the wonderful blessings of His Atonement to all of God’s children.

Where there is sunshine, shadows must be there too. Floods can bring destruction, but they usually bring life as well. Tears of grief often turn into tears of relief and happiness. Feelings of sadness when loved ones depart are later compensated with the joy of meeting again. In periods of war and destruction, many little acts of



kindness and love are also happening for those with “eyes to see, and ears to hear.”¹³

Our world today is often characterized by fear and anxiety—fear of what the future might bring for us. But Jesus has taught us to trust and “look unto [Him] in every thought; doubt not, fear not.”¹⁴

Let us constantly make a very conscious effort to see both sides of *every* coin allotted to us in our lives. Even though both sides might sometimes not be immediately visible to us, we can know and trust that they are always there.

We can rest assured that our difficulties, sorrows, afflictions, and pains do not define us; rather, it is *how* we go about them that will help us grow and draw closer to God. It is our attitudes and choices that define us much better than our challenges.

When in health, cherish and be grateful for it every moment. When in sickness, seek to patiently learn from it and know that this can change again according to God’s will. When in sorrow, trust that happiness

is around the corner; we often just cannot see it yet. Consciously shift your focus and elevate your thoughts to the positive aspects of challenges, because they are undoubtedly always there too! Never forget to be grateful. Choose to believe. Choose to have faith in Jesus Christ. Choose to always trust God. Choose to “think celestial,” as President Russell M. Nelson recently taught us!¹⁵

Let us always be mindful of our Heavenly Father’s wonderful plan for us. He loves us and sent His Beloved Son to help in our trials and to open for us the door to return to Him. Jesus Christ lives and stands there at every moment, waiting for us to choose to call upon Him to provide succor, strength, and salvation. Of these things I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. 2 Nephi 2:16.
2. 2 Nephi 2:11.
3. 2 Nephi 2:5.
4. Moroni 7:16.
5. 2 Nephi 2:5.
6. Alma 7:11, 12.
7. Helaman 5:12.

8. 3 Nephi 9:14.

9. 2 Nephi 2:11; emphasis added.

10. Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), 1.

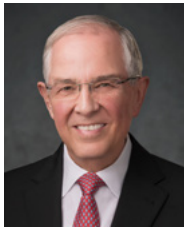
11. 2 Nephi 2:2.

12. Doctrine and Covenants 122:7.

13. Deuteronomy 29:4.

14. Doctrine and Covenants 6:36.

15. See Russell M. Nelson, “Think Celestial!,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2023, 117–20.



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

Temples, Houses of the Lord Dotting the Earth

As you come worthily and prayerfully to His holy house, you will be armed with His power.

Don't you love the beautiful words we just sang? "I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand, . . . upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand."¹ The Lord is strengthening His Saints of all ages as they come to His holy house. From Kinshasa to Zollikofen to Fukuoka to Oakland, the youth, of their own initiative, are overflowing temple baptistries. In the past, most beloved ordinance workers had graying hair—but not anymore. Called missionaries, service missionaries, and returned missionaries are around every corner. Across the world, there is a growing feeling drawing us to the house of the Lord.

Just over a year ago, a dear family friend, age 95, living on the east coast of the United States, who had been taught by missionaries for 70 years, said to her daughter, "I want to go to the temple with you."

Her daughter replied, "Well, Mother, you first need to be baptized." "OK," she replied, "then I want to be baptized." She was baptized. A few days later, she reverently entered the temple baptistry. And just over a month ago, she received her own endowment and sealing. "The knowledge and power of God are expanding; the veil o'er the earth is beginning to burst."²



Iris Larson entered the waters of baptism at age 95.

Have you wondered why the Lord would direct His prophet to now dot the earth with His holy temples?³ Why would He, at this specific time, give the needed prosperity to His covenant people that through their sacred tithes, hundreds of houses of the Lord could be built?

This morning, President Dallin H. Oaks showed a beautiful visual of the temples being constructed across the world. Kathy and I were recently in the Philippines. Think of this miracle: The Manila Temple was dedicated in 1984. It would be 26 years before the second temple, in Cebu City, was completed in 2010. Now, 14 years later, 11 temples are being constructed, designed, or prepared for dedication. From the north to the south: Laoag, Tuguegarao, Santiago, Urdaneta, Alabang, Naga, Tacloban City, Iloilo, Bacolod, Cagayan de Oro, and Davao. It is breathtaking to see the wondrous works of God!

Across the globe, houses of the Lord are coming closer to us. Why in our day?

The Last Days

The Lord warned that in the last days, there would be distress among nations,⁴ people would "be lovers of their own selves,"⁵ "all things [would] be in commotion,"⁶ confusion would abound,⁷ and "men's hearts [would] fail them."⁸ We have certainly seen



One year after her baptism, Iris Larson received her own endowment and sealing, accompanied by her son, daughter, and son-in-law.

men's and women's hearts fail them: the enticements of the world, the distraction of alluring voices, the neglect of spiritual nourishment, the fatigue from the demands of discipleship.⁹ Perhaps you have been saddened as you have seen someone you love, who at one time spoke sincerely of his or her faith in Jesus Christ, bore witness of the Book of Mormon, and eagerly helped build the kingdom of God, suddenly move away, at least for now, from his or her beliefs and toward the sidelines of the Church. My counsel to you is don't despair! All is well.

For with God, nothing is impossible.¹⁰

With this prophesied commotion and disbelief in the world, the Lord promised that there would be a covenant people, a people eagerly awaiting His return, a people who stand in holy settings and are not moved out of their place.¹¹ He spoke of a righteous people resisting the deceptions of the adversary, disciplining their faith, thinking celestial, and trusting completely in the Savior Jesus Christ.

Why is the Lord now bringing hundreds of His temples closer to us? One reason is that amid the turmoil and temptations of the world, He has promised to strengthen and bless His covenant Saints, and His promises are being fulfilled!

Promises from the Kirtland Temple

How do these holy houses strengthen, comfort, and protect us? We find an answer in the pleadings of the Prophet Joseph Smith in the dedication of the Kirtland Temple. It was in this temple where the Saints sang, "We'll sing and we'll shout with the armies of heaven."¹² The Savior Himself appeared, and prophets of old returned, bestowing additional priesthood keys to the restored gospel.¹³



Eleven temples are being constructed, designed, or prepared for dedication in the Philippines.

On that sacred occasion in the Kirtland Temple, the Prophet prayed that in the Lord's holy house, the Saints would be armed with the power of God, that the name of Jesus Christ would be upon them, that His angels would have charge over them, and that they would grow up in the Lord and "receive a fulness of the Holy Ghost."¹⁴ These powerful supplications are fulfilled in our lives as we faithfully worship in the house of the Lord.

Armed with Power

In His house, we are literally endowed with heavenly power.¹⁵ Our faith in Jesus Christ and our love for Him are confirmed and fortified. We are spiritually assured of our true identity and the purposes of life.¹⁶ As we are faithful, we are blessed with protection from temptations and distractions. We feel our Savior's love as He lifts us from our difficulties and sorrows. We are armed with the power of God.

His Name upon Us

In His holy house, we take His name more completely upon us.

When we are baptized, we profess our belief in Him and our willingness to keep His commandments. In the temple, we sacredly promise, through our covenants, to follow Him forever.

The youth of this Church are incredible. In a difficult world, they take upon themselves the name of Christ. In Heber City, Utah, a public meeting was held to discuss the details of a temple planned for construction. Three hundred youth filled the adjoining park to show their support for the proposed temple. One young man, speaking to government leaders in an open forum, courageously explained, "I am hoping to be married in this temple. [The temple will help] me to keep myself clean and pure." Another described the temple as a symbol of light and hope. Young men and women of the Church throughout the world are embracing the name of Jesus Christ.¹⁷

Angels with Us

In the Kirtland Temple, the Prophet Joseph prayed that "angels [would] have charge over [His Saints]."¹⁸ Regularly performing

ordinances for our ancestors in the temple brings a sweet and sure confirmation that life continues beyond the veil.

Although many of our experiences in the house of the Lord are too sacred to share publicly, some we can share. Forty years ago, while living in Florida, Kathy and I traveled to the temple in Atlanta, Georgia. On Wednesday night, May 9, 1984, as we completed a session in the temple, an ordinance worker approached me and asked if I had time to do just one preparatory initiatory ordinance. The name of the person I represented was unusual. His name was Eleazer Cercy.

The next day, the temple was full of Saints. As I prepared to perform my second endowment of the day, I was given the name of the person I would represent. Surprisingly, the name was the same individual from the night before, Eleazer Cercy. I felt the Spirit of the Lord as the endowment was completed. Later in the afternoon, still in the temple, Kathy saw an elderly family friend, Sister Dolly Fernandez, who now lived in Atlanta. With no male members of her family with her, she asked if I could possibly assist in the sealing of her father to her father's parents. I was of course honored.

As I knelt at the end of the altar for this sacred ordinance, I heard once again the name that was now inscribed in my mind, her father, Eleazer Cercy. I fully believe that following this life, I will meet and embrace a man known in his mortal life as Eleazer Cercy.

Most of our experiences in the house of the Lord bring joyful peace and quiet revelation more than dramatic intervention. But be assured: angels do have charge over us!



Rendition of the proposed temple in Heber City, Utah, USA.

A Fulness of the Holy Ghost

The gift of the Holy Ghost is given to us as we are confirmed a member of the Church. Each week as we worthily partake of the bread and water in remembrance of our Savior, we are promised His Spirit will always be with us.¹⁹ As we come with willing hearts to the house of the Lord, the most holy place on earth, we grow up in the Lord and can “receive a fulness of the Holy Ghost.”²⁰ Through the power of the Holy Ghost, we are filled with peace and joy and unspeakable hope.²¹ We receive the strength to remain His disciples even when we find ourselves outside of holy places.

President Russell M. Nelson has declared: “Our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, will perform some of His mightiest works between now and when He comes again. We will see miraculous indications that God the Father and . . . Jesus Christ . . . preside over this Church in majesty and glory.”²² Dotting the earth with houses of the Lord is a mighty work and miraculous indication.²³

My beloved friends, if we are able and have not already increased our

attendance at the temple, let us regularly find more time to worship in the house of the Lord. Let us pray for the temples that have been announced, that properties can be purchased, that governments will approve plans, that talented workers will see their gifts magnified, and that the sacred dedications will bring the approval of heaven and the visit of angels.

Promises

The temple is literally the house of the Lord. I promise you as you come worthily and prayerfully to His holy house, you will be armed with His power, His name will be upon you, His angels will have charge over you, and you will grow up in the blessing of the Holy Ghost.

The Lord promised, “Every soul who forsaketh his sins and cometh unto me, and calleth on my name, and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face and know that I am.”²⁴ There are many different ways to see the face of Christ, and there is no better place than in His holy house.²⁵



Three hundred youth gathered to show their support for the proposed Heber Valley Utah Temple, a symbol of light and hope.

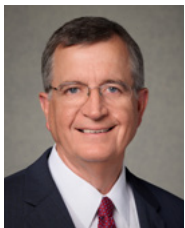
In this day of confusion and commotion, I testify that the temple is His holy house and will help preserve us, protect us, and prepare us for the glorious day when, with all His holy angels, our Savior returns in majesty, power, and great glory. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. "How Firm a Foundation," *Hymns*, no. 85.
2. "The Spirit of God," *Hymns*, no. 2.
3. There are currently 182 operating temples. Six are under renovation. Seven are awaiting dedication, with one more awaiting rededication. There are 45 under construction and 94 more which have been announced or are in planning and design.
4. See Luke 21:10.
5. 2 Timothy 3:2.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 88:91.
7. Elder David A. Bednar said: "Gospel principles are for me and you what a helm is to a ship. Correct principles enable us to find our way and to stand firm, steadfast, and immovable so we do not lose our balance and fall in the raging latter-day storms of darkness and confusion" ("The Principles of My Gospel," *Liahona*, May 2021, 126).
8. Doctrine and Covenants 45:26.
9. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).
10. See Luke 1:37.
11. See Doctrine and Covenants 87:8.
12. *Hymns*, no. 2.
13. See Doctrine and Covenants 110. Prior to this time, the Prophet Joseph Smith had received the Aaronic Priesthood and its keys from John the Baptist, and he had received the Melchizedek Priesthood and its keys from the Apostles Peter, James, and John (see Doctrine and Covenants 13:1; 27:12–13).
14. Doctrine and Covenants 109:15; see also verse 22.
15. President Russell M. Nelson said: "The temple can help us in our quest. There we are endowed with God's power, giving us the ability to overcome Satan, the instigator of *all* contention" ("Peacemakers Needed," *Liahona*, May 2023, 101).
16. See Russell M. Nelson, "Choices for Eternity" (worldwide devotional for young adults, May 15, 2022), Gospel Library.
17. Elder Colin Stauffer, personal correspondence, Jan. 30, 2024.
18. Doctrine and Covenants 109:22.
19. See Doctrine and Covenants 20:77, 79.
20. Doctrine and Covenants 109:15.
21. See Romans 15:13.
22. Russell M. Nelson, "Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2018, 96.
23. President Brigham Young said, "We will have hundreds of temples and thousands of men and women officiating therein for those who have fallen asleep, without having had the privilege of hearing and obeying the Gospel" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* [1997], 312). And President Ezra Taft Benson said: "Our predecessors have prophesied that temples will dot the landscape of North and South America, the isles of the Pacific, Europe, and elsewhere. If this redemptive work is to be done on the scale it must be, hundreds of temples will be needed" (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [1988], 247).
24. Doctrine and Covenants 93:1.
25. Elder David B. Haight said:

"It is true that some have actually seen the Savior, but when one consults the dictionary, he learns that there are many other meanings of the word *see*, such as coming to know Him, discerning Him, recognizing Him and His work, perceiving His importance, or coming to understand Him.

"Such heavenly enlightenment and blessings are available to each of us" ("Temples and Work Therein," *Ensign*, Nov. 1990, 61).



By President Mark L. Pace
Sunday School General President

It Is Wisdom in the Lord That We Should Have the Book of Mormon

It is my prayer that reading the Book of Mormon this year will be a joy and a blessing for each of us.

Dear brothers and sisters, we are so grateful for your efforts in reading the scriptures with *Come, Follow Me*. Thank you for all you are doing. Your daily connection with God and His word has profound consequences. “Ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great.”¹

Reading the Savior’s teachings in the scriptures helps us transform our homes into sanctuaries of faith and centers of gospel learning.² It invites the Spirit into our homes. The Holy Ghost fills our souls with joy³ and converts us into lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ.

Over these last several years, while reading the books of holy scripture, we have observed the panorama of God’s teachings to His children in all the major gospel dispensations.⁴

In every dispensation, we have seen a familiar pattern. God restores or reveals the gospel of Jesus Christ through His prophets. The people follow the prophets and are greatly blessed. However, over time, some people stop heeding the words of the prophets and distance themselves from the Lord and His gospel. This

is what we call apostasy. The gospel was first revealed to Adam, but some of the children of Adam and Eve turned away from the Lord in apostasy.⁵ We see a pattern of restoration and apostasy repeated in the dispensations of Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and others.

Now, today, we live in the dispensation of the fulness of times.⁶ This is the only dispensation that will not end in an apostasy.⁷ It is this dispensation that will usher in the Second Coming of the Savior Jesus Christ and His millennial reign.

So, what’s different about this dispensation? What has the Lord provided us today, especially for our time, that will help us draw near to the Savior and never leave Him?

One answer that comes to my mind is the scriptures—and particularly the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ.

While God has promised there will never be another *general* apostasy, we need to be mindful and careful to avoid a *personal* apostasy—remembering, as President Russell M. Nelson has taught, “We are each responsible for our individual spiritual growth.”⁸

Studying the Book of Mormon, as we are doing this year, always brings us closer to the Savior—and helps us stay close to Him.

We call it “study,” and that’s good because it implies effort. But we don’t always need to learn some new fact. Sometimes reading the Book of Mormon is just about feeling connected to God today—nourishing the soul, being strengthened spiritually before heading out to face the world, or finding healing *after* a rough day out in the world.

We study the scriptures so the Holy Ghost, the great teacher, can deepen our conversion to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ and help us become more like Them.⁹

With these thoughts in mind, we could consider, “What has the Holy Ghost taught us this week during our study of the Book of Mormon?” and “How does this bring us closer to the Savior?”

These are good questions for our scripture study at home. They are also excellent questions to start a Sunday class at church. We improve



Puerto Rico



Chile

our teaching at church on Sunday by improving our learning at home during the week. Thus, in our Sunday classes, “he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together.”¹⁰

Here are a few verses the Spirit has impressed upon my mind from this week’s Book of Mormon study:

- Nephi instructed Jacob to “pre-serve these plates and hand

them down . . . from generation to generation. And if there were preaching which was sacred, or revelation. . . , or prophesying,” Jacob should “engraven . . . them upon these plates . . . for the sake of [their] people.”¹¹

- Jacob later testified, “We search the [scriptures], . . . and having all these witnesses we obtain a hope, and our faith becometh unshaken.”¹²

Now, these verses caused me to remember what Nephi had said previously about the brass plates:

“We had obtained the records . . . and searched them and found that they were . . . of great worth unto us, insomuch that we could preserve the commandments of the Lord unto our children.

“Wherefore, it was wisdom in the Lord that we should carry them with us, as we journeyed in the wilderness towards the land of promise.”¹³



Now, if it was wisdom for Lehi and his family to have the scriptures, it is just as wise for us today. The great worth and spiritual power of the scriptures continue undimmed in our lives today.

There has never been a people in history with the access to the Book of Mormon and other scriptures that we enjoy today.¹⁴ Yes, Lehi and his family were blessed to carry the brass plates with them, but they didn't have a copy for every tent! The most

important copy of the Book of Mormon is our personal copy. It is the copy that we read.

In Lehi's vision of the tree of life, Lehi taught us the importance of personal experience with the love of God. After he partook of the fruit, Lehi saw his wife, Sariah, and his sons Nephi and Sam a little way off.

"They stood as if they knew not whither they should go.

"... I beckoned unto them," Lehi said, "and I also did say unto them with a *loud voice* that they should come unto me, and partake of the fruit, which was desirable above all other fruit.

"And . . . they did come unto me and partake of the fruit."¹⁵

I love Lehi's example of intentional parenting. Sariah, Nephi, and Sam were living good, righteous lives. But the Lord had something better, something sweeter for them. They didn't know where to find it, but Lehi did. So he called to them "with a loud voice" to come to the tree of life and partake of the fruit for themselves. His direction was clear. There could be no misunderstanding:

I am the product of a similar kind of intentional parenting.¹⁶ When I was a young boy, maybe 11 or 12 years old, my mother asked me, "Mark, do you know for yourself, by the Holy Ghost, that the gospel is true?"

Her question surprised me. I had always tried to be a "good boy," and I thought that was enough. But my mother, like Lehi, knew that something more was needed. I needed to act and know for myself.

I replied that I had not yet had that experience. And she didn't seem surprised at all by my answer.

She then said something I have never forgotten. I remember her words to this day: "Heavenly Father

wants you to know for yourself. But you must put in the effort. You need to read the Book of Mormon and pray to know by the Holy Ghost. Heavenly Father will answer your prayers."

Well, I had never read the Book of Mormon before. I didn't think I was old enough to do that. But my mother knew better.

Her question ignited in me a desire to know for myself.

So, each night, in the bedroom I shared with two of my brothers, I turned on the light above my bed and read a chapter in the Book of Mormon. Then, turning off the light, I slipped out of my bed onto my knees and prayed. I prayed more sincerely and with greater desire than I ever had before. I asked Heavenly Father to please let me know of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.

From the time I started reading the Book of Mormon, I felt that Heavenly Father was aware of my efforts. And I felt that I mattered to Him. As I read and prayed, comfortable, peaceful feelings rested upon me. Chapter by chapter, the light of faith was growing brighter inside my soul. In time, I realized that these feelings were confirmations of truth from the Holy Ghost.¹⁷ I came to know for myself that the Book of Mormon is true and that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. How grateful I am for my mother's inspired invitation.

This experience reading the Book of Mormon as a boy started a pattern of scripture study that continues to bless me to this day. I still read the Book of Mormon and kneel in prayer. And the Holy Ghost confirms its truths over and over again.

Nephi said it right. It was wisdom in the Lord that we should carry the scriptures with us throughout our



United Kingdom

lives. The Book of Mormon is the “keystone” that makes this dispensation different from all previous dispensations. As we study the Book of Mormon and follow the living prophet, there will be no personal apostasy in our lives.¹⁸

The invitation to come to the tree of life by holding fast to the word of God is not just an invitation from Lehi to his family, and it is not just an invitation from my mother for me to read and pray about the Book of Mormon. It is also an invitation from our prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, to each one of us.

“I promise,” he said, “that as you prayerfully study the Book of Mormon *every day*, you will make better decisions—*every day*. I promise that as you ponder what you study, the windows of heaven will open, and you will receive answers to your own questions and direction for your own life.”¹⁹

It is my prayer that reading the Book of Mormon this year will be a joy and a blessing for each of us and will draw us ever nearer to the Savior.

Heavenly Father lives. Jesus Christ is our Savior and Redeemer. The Book of Mormon contains His words and conveys His love. President Russell M. Nelson is the Lord’s living prophet on the earth today. I know these things to be true because of the confirming

witness of the Holy Ghost, which witness I first received while reading the Book of Mormon as a boy. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Doctrine and Covenants 64:33.
2. “The new home-centered, Church-supported integrated curriculum has the potential to unleash the power of families, as each family follows through conscientiously and carefully to transform their home into a sanctuary of faith. I promise that as you diligently work to remodel your home into a center of gospel learning, over time *your* Sabbath days will truly be a delight. *Your* children will be excited to learn and to live the Savior’s teachings, and the influence of the adversary in *your* life and in *your* home will decrease. Changes in your family will be dramatic and sustaining” (Russell M. Nelson, “Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 113).
3. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, I will impart unto you of my Spirit, which shall enlighten your mind, which shall fill your soul with joy” (Doctrine and Covenants 11:13).
4. “Dispensations are time periods in which the Lord has at least one authorized servant on the earth who bears the holy priesthood and the keys, and who has a divine commission to dispense the gospel to the inhabitants of the earth” (Topics and Questions, “Dispensations,” Gospel Library).
5. See Moses 5:12–16.
6. The prophet Daniel saw our day, our dispensation, when he interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the stone in that dream, cut out of the mountain without hands, rolling forward to fill the whole earth (see Daniel 2:34–35, 44–45; Doctrine and Covenants 65:2).
7. “God the Father and Jesus Christ called upon the Prophet Joseph Smith to be the

prophet of this dispensation. All divine powers of previous dispensations were to be restored through him. This dispensation of the fulness of times would not be limited in time or in location. It would not end in apostasy, and it would fill the world” (Russell M. Nelson, “The Gathering of Scattered Israel,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2006, 79–80).

8. Russell M. Nelson, “Opening Remarks,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 8.
9. See “Conversion Is Our Goal,” *Come Follow Me—For Home and Church: Book of Mormon 2024*, v.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 50:22; see also verses 17–21.
11. Jacob 1:3–4.
12. Jacob 4:6.
13. 1 Nephi 5:21–22.
14. It was recently announced that 200 million copies of the Book of Mormon have been distributed in this dispensation. That is truly remarkable. The Book of Mormon has now been translated into 113 languages, with 17 new translations in process. What a blessing to have the Book of Mormon in print, digital, audio, video, and other formats. (See Ryan Jensen, “Church Distributes 200 Millionth Copy of the Book of Mormon,” *Church News*, Dec. 29, 2023, thechurchnews.com.)
15. 1 Nephi 8:14–16; emphasis added.
16. “The most powerful spiritual influence in the life of a child is the righteous example of loving parents and grandparents who faithfully keep their own sacred covenants. Intentional parents teach their children faith in the Lord Jesus Christ so that they too ‘may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins’ [2 Nephi 25:26]. Casual and inconsistent covenant keeping leads to spiritual casualty. The spiritual damage is often greatest on our children and grandchildren” (Kevin W. Pearson, “Are You Still Willing?,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2022, 69).
17. See Doctrine and Covenants 6:22–24.
18. The Prophet Joseph Smith said, “I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book” (in the introduction to the Book of Mormon).
19. Russell M. Nelson, “The Book of Mormon: What Would Your Life Be Like without It?,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2017, 62–63.



By President Russell M. Nelson

President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Rejoice in the Gift of Priesthood Keys

Priesthood keys govern how the priesthood of God may be used to bring about the Lord's purposes and bless all who accept the restored gospel.

My dear brothers and sisters, today is an historic day for President Dallin H. Oaks and me. It was 40 years ago, on April 7, 1984, when we were sustained to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.¹ We have rejoiced in each and every general conference since then, including this one. We have once again been blessed with a sacred outpouring of the Spirit. I hope you will repeatedly study the messages of this conference throughout the coming months.

When I was born,² there were six functioning temples in the Church—one each in St. George, Logan, Manti, and Salt Lake City, Utah; as well as in Cardston, Alberta, Canada; and Laie, Hawaii. Two earlier temples had functioned briefly in Kirtland, Ohio, and Nauvoo, Illinois. As the body of the Church moved west, the Saints were forced to leave those two temples behind.

The Nauvoo Temple was destroyed by an arsonist's fire. It was rebuilt and then dedicated by President Gordon B. Hinckley.³ The Kirtland Temple was desecrated by enemies of the Church. Later the Kirtland Temple was acquired by Community of Christ, which has owned it for many years.

Last month we announced that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has purchased the Kirtland Temple, along with several significant historic sites in Nauvoo. We greatly appreciate the cordial and mutually beneficial discussions we had with leaders from Community of Christ that led to this agreement.

The Kirtland Temple has unusual significance in the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Several events that took place there had been prophesied for millennia and were essential for the Lord's restored Church to fulfill its latter-day mission.

The most important of these events occurred on Easter Sunday, April 3, 1836.⁴ On that day, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery experienced a *series* of remarkable visitations. First, the Lord Jesus Christ appeared. The Prophet recorded that the Savior's "eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun; and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters."⁵

During this visitation, the Lord affirmed His identity. He said, "I am the first and the last; I am he who

liveth, I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father."⁶

Jesus Christ then declared that He had accepted the temple as *His* house and made this stunning promise: "I will manifest myself to my people in mercy in this house."⁷

This significant promise applies to *every* dedicated temple today. I invite you to ponder what the Lord's promise means for you personally.

Following the Savior's visitation, Moses appeared. Moses conferred upon Joseph Smith the keys for the gathering of Israel and the return of the ten tribes.⁸

When this vision closed, "Elias appeared, and committed the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham" to Joseph.⁹

Then Elijah the prophet appeared. His appearance fulfilled Malachi's promise that before the Second Coming, the Lord would send Elijah to "turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers."¹⁰ Elijah conferred the keys of the sealing power upon Joseph Smith.¹¹

The significance of these keys



The Kirtland Temple



being returned to the earth by three heavenly messengers under the direction of the Lord cannot be overstated. Priesthood keys constitute the authority and power of presidency. Priesthood keys govern how the priesthood of God may be used to bring about the Lord's purposes and bless all who accept the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is important to note that prior to the organization of the Church, heavenly messengers had conferred the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods upon the Prophet Joseph and had given him keys of both priesthoods.¹² These keys gave Joseph Smith authority to organize the Church in 1830.¹³

Then in the Kirtland Temple in 1836, the conferral of these three additional priesthood keys—namely, keys of the gathering of Israel, keys of the gospel of Abraham, and keys of the sealing power—was essential. These keys authorized Joseph Smith—and all succeeding Presidents of the Lord's Church—to gather Israel on both sides of the veil, to bless all covenant children with the blessings of Abraham, to place a ratifying seal on priesthood ordinances and covenants, and to seal families eternally. The power of these priesthood keys is infinite and breathtaking.

Consider how *your* life would be different if priesthood keys had not been restored to the earth.¹⁴ Without priesthood keys, you could not be endowed with the power of God.¹⁵ Without priesthood keys, the Church could serve only as a significant teaching and humanitarian organization but not much more. Without priesthood keys, none of us would have access to essential ordinances and covenants that bind us to our loved ones eternally and allow us eventually to live with God.

Priesthood keys distinguish The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from any other organization on earth. Many other organizations *can* and *do* make your life better here in mortality. But no other organization *can* and *will* influence your life after death.¹⁶

Priesthood keys give us the authority to extend all of the blessings promised to Abraham to every covenant-keeping man and woman. Temple work makes these exquisite blessings available to *all* of God's children, regardless of *where* or *when* they lived or now live. Let us rejoice that priesthood keys are once again on the earth!

I invite you to consider carefully the following three statements:

1. The gathering of Israel is evidence that God loves *all* of His children everywhere.
2. The gospel of Abraham is *further* evidence that God loves *all* of His children everywhere. He invites *all* to come unto Him—"black and white, bond and free, male and female; . . . *all* are alike unto God."¹⁷
3. The sealing power is *supernal* evidence of how much God loves *all* of His children everywhere and wants *each* of them to choose to return home to Him.

Priesthood keys restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith make it possible for *every* covenant-keeping man and woman to enjoy incredible *personal* spiritual privileges. Here again, there is much we can learn from the sacred history of the Kirtland Temple.

Joseph Smith's dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple is a tutorial about how the temple spiritually empowers you and me to meet the challenges of life in these last days. I encourage

you to study that prayer, recorded in Doctrine and Covenants section 109. That dedicatory prayer, which was *received by revelation*, teaches that the temple is "a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God."¹⁸

This list of attributes is much more than a description of a temple. It is a promise about what will happen to those who serve and worship in the house of the Lord. They can *expect* to receive answers to prayer, personal revelation, greater faith, strength, comfort, increased knowledge, and increased power.

Time in the temple will help you to *think celestial* and to catch a vision of who you really are, who you can become, and the kind of life you can have forever. Regular temple worship will enhance the way you see yourself and how you fit into God's magnificent plan. I promise you that.

We are also promised that in the temple we may "receive a fulness of the Holy Ghost."¹⁹ Imagine what *that* promise means in terms of having the heavens open for each earnest seeker of eternal truth.

We are instructed that all who worship in the temple will have the power of God and angels having "charge over them."²⁰ How much does it increase your confidence to know that, as an endowed woman or man armed with the power of God, you do not have to face life alone? What courage does it give you to know that angels really will help you?

Finally, we are promised that "no combination of wickedness" will prevail over those who worship in the house of the Lord.²¹

Understanding the spiritual privileges made possible in the temple is vital to each of us today.



My dear brothers and sisters, here is my promise. Nothing will help you *more* to hold fast to the iron rod²² than worshipping in the temple as regularly as your circumstances permit. Nothing will protect you *more* as you encounter the world's mists of darkness. Nothing will bolster your testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Atonement or help you understand God's magnificent plan *more*. Nothing will soothe your spirit *more* during times of pain. Nothing will open the heavens *more*. Nothing!

The temple *is* the gateway to the greatest blessings God has in store for each of us, for the temple is the only

place on earth where we may receive *all* of the blessings promised to Abraham.²³ That is why we are doing all within our power, under the direction of the Lord, to make the temple blessings more accessible to members of the Church. Thus, we are pleased to announce that we plan to build a new temple in each of the following 15 locations:

- Uturoa, French Polynesia
- Chihuahua, Mexico
- Florianópolis, Brazil
- Rosario, Argentina
- Edinburgh, Scotland
- Brisbane, Australia south area

- Victoria, British Columbia
- Yuma, Arizona
- Houston, Texas south area
- Des Moines, Iowa
- Cincinnati, Ohio
- Honolulu, Hawaii
- West Jordan, Utah
- Lehi, Utah
- Maracaibo, Venezuela

My dear brothers and sisters, I testify that this *is* The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He stands at its head. We are His disciples.

Let us *rejoice* in the restoration of priesthood keys, which make it possible for you and me to enjoy *every*



spiritual blessing we are *willing* and worthy to receive. I so testify in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. I filled the vacancy in the Quorum of the Twelve left by the January 11, 1983, death of Elder LeGrand Richards. Elder Oaks filled that which was left by the January 11, 1984, death of Mark E. Petersen.
2. September 9, 1924.
3. The dedication of the rebuilt Nauvoo Illinois Temple by President Gordon B. Hinckley occurred on June 27, 2002, the 158th anniversary of the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith.
4. Just one week after the Prophet Joseph Smith dedicated the Kirtland Temple.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 110:3.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 110:4.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 110:7.
8. See Doctrine and Covenants 110:11.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 110:12. This was a perpetuation of the promise the Lord had made to Abraham thousands of years earlier (see Genesis 18:18; 1 Nephi 15:18).
10. See Malachi 4:5–6.
11. See Doctrine and Covenants 110:13–16.
12. See Doctrine and Covenants 13; 27:7–8, 12.
13. See Doctrine and Covenants 20:1–4.
14. When the Lord told Joseph Smith that this dispensation is the time when “nothing shall be withheld” (Doctrine and Covenants 121:28), it was because these priesthood keys had been returned to the earth.
15. See Doctrine and Covenants 95:8; 109:22.
16. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:45–46.
17. 2 Nephi 26:33; emphasis added.
18. Doctrine and Covenants 109:8.
19. Doctrine and Covenants 109:15.
20. Doctrine and Covenants 109:22.
21. See Doctrine and Covenants 109:24–26.
22. Meaning the word of God.
23. See Doctrine and Covenants 110:12; 132:29–30.



The Influence of Women

By President Russell M. Nelson

President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

My dear sisters of Relief Society, I am grateful to speak with you today. You are often on my mind. I am deeply grateful *for* you and feel indebted *to* you. So much of the good this Church accomplishes—and so much of the good that happens in the world—takes place because of *you*! Thank you for your devotion to the Lord as well as your efforts to ennoble others. I know how much the Lord loves you and depends upon you.

I marvel at your faith and sensitivity to things of the Spirit. I am inspired by your diligence, dynamic leadership, and your ability to see a need and meet it. Whether it be illiteracy, malnutrition, mental health concerns, or the day-to-day needs of others, you tackle real-life issues with a rare combination of skill, compassion, insight, and love. The entire mission of the Lord's Church is strengthened by you.

Sisters, you have a divine endowment that allows you literally to change lives! This is particularly true as we are anxiously engaged in the divine mandate to gather Israel. *Anytime* we help *anyone* find the covenant path and stay on it, we are helping to gather Israel. No one does this better than you do—as mothers, leaders, teachers, sisters, and friends. You are preparing future generations of the Lord's Church and the world!

Recently, we learned of a little three-year old girl who awakened from her nap. To entertain her, her brother brought her one stuffed animal after another. But what finally brought her comfort and joy? Her very own copy of the Book of Mormon! This little girl watches her mother read from the Book of Mormon every day. She wanted to be like her mother!

It is simply not possible to quantify the life-refining influence of covenant women of God. I love my

Brethren, and I cherish the privilege of working with them. However, the two people on earth who have influenced me most are my wife Dantzel, mother of our 10 children, who passed away suddenly at age 78, and, for the past 18 years, my wonderful wife Wendy.

During my recent strenuous recovery from a fall, Wendy has cared for me tirelessly both physically and spiritually. She has done it in ways no one else could. The enormous influence that Dantzel and Wendy have had on me cannot be overstated. They have changed my life! They have made my life more complete.

Women have been at the center of our Heavenly Father's plan from the beginning. God's plan of salvation was dependent upon the heroic actions of two valiant women—Eve,¹ “the mother of all living,”² and Mary,³ the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sisters, please never underestimate the extraordinary power within you to influence others for good. It is a gift with which our Heavenly Father has endowed *every covenant woman*. As a covenant daughter of God, you have receptivity to the Spirit and an enhanced moral compass that give you the capacity to receive personal revelation and to discern truth from error. In saying this, I do not absolve men from distinguishing right from wrong or from doing the spiritual work to receive revelation. However, *if* the world should ever lose the moral rectitude of its women, the world would never recover.⁴

Sisters, we need your voices teaching the doctrine of Christ. We need your ability as women to detect deception and to articulate truth. We need your inspired wisdom in your family, ward, and stake councils, as well as in other places of influence throughout the world. Your family, the Church, and the world need you! Sisters,

no one can do everything, nor should you try. However, I know how crucial your part is in building up the kingdom of God.

So, today, I invite you to make the scriptures your personal Liahona,⁵ the temple your place of refuge and recalibration, and your personal prayers the way you learn where the Lord needs you to be *that* day. Over time, you will be astonished by how He will guide you to be *exactly* where you can lead, guide, and walk beside someone who needs *you*.

To that end, I bless you with increased spiritual discernment and the ability to find joy in offering relief to others. I bless you with the wisdom to discern what is needful and not to run faster than you are able. I bless you with the courage to live up to your divine privileges as a covenant daughter of God. I bless you to feel deeply that Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, know you and love you. They sent you to earth *now* because you are

vital to the kingdom of God *now*! I bless you to realize that your divine gifts as a daughter of God give you the power not only to change lives but to change the world!

I love you, my dear sisters. These things are true. We are all engaged in the work of the Lord. I testify that Jesus Christ lives! He stands at the head of this Church. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See Moses 4:6–14.
2. Genesis 3:20; see also Moses 4:26.
3. See 1 Nephi 11:13–21; Alma 7:10.
4. See Russell M. Nelson, “Spiritual Treasures,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2019, 76–79.
5. See Alma 37:44.

Scan the code to read or watch the messages given by the Relief Society General Presidency in the 2024 Worldwide Relief Society Devotional (available in many languages).



Relief Society, Young Women, and Primary General Presidencies (from left): Kristin M. Yee, Tamara W. Runia, Tracy Y. Browning, Susan H. Porter, J. Anette Dennis, Emily Belle Freeman, Camille N. Johnson, Andrea Muñoz Spannaus, and Amy A. Wright.





Elder Patrick Kearon: Prepared and Called by the Lord

By Elder D. Todd Christofferson
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

The Lord has prepared Elder Kearon in unique ways and endowed him with an array of spiritual gifts that will allow him to bless others in his sacred call as a special witness “of the name of Christ in all the world.”

One Saturday several years after having been called as a General Authority Seventy, Elder Patrick Kearon and his wife, Jennifer, were entering a supermarket as Elder W. Rolfe Kerr and his wife, Janeil, were leaving. They visited briefly, and then the Kerrs headed to their car.

Almost immediately, a man approached Elder Kearon and excitedly asked him, “Was that a General Authority you were speaking to?” Elder Kearon responded, “Yes. That was Elder W. Rolfe Kerr of the Seventy.”¹ The man nodded, looked directly at Elder Kearon without recognizing him, and said, “You can *always* tell a General Authority, can’t you?” Then the man hurried off.

“I love that story because it so represents how I feel,” says Elder Kearon with a smile. “I could have the same experience today, and that man would still probably not pick me out of a crowd as being a General Authority.”

Elder Kearon’s self-deprecating humor and humility endear him to those who know him or have had the privilege of serving with him. Called to, and ordained a member of, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles on December 7, 2023, Elder Kearon knows that his new calling is less about him than it is about the ongoing work of the Lord.

“We all get to be part of His work,” he says, “trying to help people feel His light and His love and His care. What He wants us to do as members of His Church is bless the lives of others.”

The Lord has prepared Elder Kearon in unique ways and endowed him with an array of spiritual gifts that will allow him to bless others in his sacred call as a special witness “of the name of Christ in all the world” (Doctrine and Covenants 107:23). A convert to the Church at age 26 and the only member of the Church among his siblings, Elder Kearon is a man of deep empathy who knows how to listen to, connect with, and comfort God’s children. He is charitable by nature and finds joy in service. Touched by tender experiences and the loss of loved ones, he testifies that the Savior Jesus Christ, through His Atonement, offers healing balm and will one day make everything right.

Elder Kearon is a genuine disciple of Jesus Christ who trusts in the Lord. He is a leader who is easy to follow because he is devoted to following the Savior and to leading people to Him.

“The Lord,” says President Jeffrey R. Holland, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “has led Patrick to the position he now holds.”

Loving, Devoted Parents

Patrick Kearon was born in Carlisle, Cumbria, in northern England on July 18, 1961, to Paddy and Patricia Kearon. When his parents met, they were serving in the British armed forces during World War II—his mother as an army nurse in India and Burma and his father in the Royal Air Force (RAF), deployed in France, North Africa, Sicily, and Italy.

Though not church-going people, they lived lives of family devotion, service, and sacrifice that left a lasting impression on Patrick, the youngest of the couple's five children. He remembers Pat as a loving, "extraordinary mother," gently guiding, mostly by example, and never critical of anyone. She was generous, steady, and remarkably balanced. And he remembers Paddy for "his energy, kindness, and irrepressible warmth; his love of . . . Arabia's arid deserts [and] England's and Ireland's lush rolling hills; and his passion for the skies, the sunshine, and the sea. I can clearly recognize his imprint on my own yearning to be outside, in the open, in the air and sunlight."²

Following his RAF service, Elder Kearon's father went to work as a defense contractor in Saudi Arabia. Patrick, as a seven-year-old boy, learned an important lesson there in obedience, memorably recounted in his first general conference talk as a General Authority. Ignoring his parents' instructions to wear shoes during a desert camping trip, he went exploring in "flip-flops" and suffered a scorpion sting in the arch of his foot.³

Three years later, young Patrick found himself in boarding school back in England feeling great loneliness for his parents, a loneliness cushioned only by their encouraging letters.

"Harry Potter definitely had it cushy at Hogwarts by comparison. It was hard," he says of boarding school. "I'd go home only for Christmas, Easter, and summer. I made little calendars on sheets of paper, putting a line through each day, counting down the days until I could return to my family."

A few years later, while Patrick was at his second boarding school in England, a powerful storm blew in from the Irish Sea. The resulting storm surge flooded 5,000 homes in the surrounding area. Patrick and his classmates were called upon to help with the massive cleanup.

"I still remember the weight of the sodden carpets and the stench of it all," he says. "But I remember digging in and getting the work done with my fellow school friends. And I remember the people and their gratitude."



Elder Kearon, pictured above as a boy in Saudi Arabia, remembers his parents, Paddy and Patricia, for their exemplary lives of devotion, service, and sacrifice.

That experience was perhaps Patrick's first glimpse into the mutual blessings of rendering and receiving service. Later, he realized that his teenage feelings of insecurity had left him "while I was involved in this great effort to assist our neighbors."⁴

Following high school, Patrick returned to Saudi Arabia, where he began management training with a multinational food and drink conglomerate. That experience initiated his work in several industries, eventually concluding in communications consultancy in England with Sister Kearon.

"My World Turned Upside Down"

When Patrick was 19, he lost his father and brother-in-law in a tragic car accident in Saudi Arabia. "My world turned upside down with their loss," he says. His father's guiding



Elder Kearon meets with young adults in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA (top), and with members of the NAACP at a community farm project in San Francisco, California, USA (above).

hand, loving encouragement, and joyful view of the world were gone. Lost in grief and emptiness for a time, Patrick went home to England with his mother but eventually returned to work in Saudi Arabia.

“I had all sorts of valuable opportunities to learn and grow and see how businesses worked,” he says. He was especially grateful for “a wonderful boss who coached and guided me and became a dear friend. He was one of several father-type figures I’ve been blessed with since my father’s death.”

Later, while working back in London, Patrick met some members of the Church.

“They were great examples of our faith,” he recalls. “One of them was from California, and I went and stayed with that family while I worked there.”

That experience gave Patrick a wonderful foundation of understanding the Church. He was touched by the joy the family found in service, but he had many questions about Church doctrine and beliefs. Back in England two years later, however, he met some “impressive missionaries” on the streets of London. After discussing the gospel with them for several months and being told he was not progressing toward baptism, they asked him if he would like a blessing.

“I agreed to have a blessing from a senior missionary I knew,” he recalls. “How I felt during that blessing was a key moment in my conversion. It was an absolutely undeniable sense of light and joy and peace that no words can describe. The words of the blessing proved inspired and definitely prescient.”

That experience, coupled with “a number of other things in my progress toward baptism,” led Patrick to a testimony of the Savior and His restored Church. A couple of months later, on Christmas Eve 1987, he was baptized a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

For those seeking a testimony, Elder Kearon says: “Choose faith, and respond to the invitation in Alma 32. Follow your spiritual feelings. They will guide you, and you will know.”

“A Source of Strength”

Two years after his baptism, Patrick was attending a young single adult ward in London when he met Jennifer Hulme, a Brigham Young University student from Saratoga, California. Jennifer had come to London for six months to study art history and English literature. The youngest of eight children, she had been raised in the Church.

Almost immediately, Patrick caught her eye.

“As I watched him interact with people in the ward, I saw the way he treated them,” Jennifer says of Patrick. “Whether it was a new member, a returning member, someone who was having struggles, or someone who was a close friend, he treated everyone with the same kind of genuine love and interest. That quality first and foremost drew me to him. It is a quality I have seen him develop, and that God has put to good use, over the 33 years we have been married.”

After their courtship, the couple married in the Oakland California Temple in January 1991. They then raised their family in England for 19 years until Elder Kearon was called in 2010 as a General Authority Seventy after serving in several leadership callings, including as a stake president and Area Seventy. He was serving as Senior President of the Seventy when he was called to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Elder Kearon says his wife is a faithful disciple who knows her true identity. “She lives a happy, positive, constructive, helpful, joyful life, with the Savior at the center of it all. She has been a source of strength and an enormous blessing to me since the moment we met.”

Susannah, the second of the couple’s three daughters, says her mother loves to give of herself: “She is full of life and light and has a passion for the gospel.” And like her father, her mother is an “excellent listener.”

Susannah and her sisters say their parents’ love and respect for each other allows them to work united in faith toward common goals. They listen to one another and respect and appreciate each other’s thoughts and opinions.

Emma, the couple’s youngest daughter, says her parents’ harmonious relationship and overt love for their children “has made for a very happy and secure home environment.”

Lizzie Kearon Staheli, the oldest, says of her father: “Dad sees people with Christlike eyes. He is always anxious to encourage and empower people. He sees the potential in everyone, whatever their circumstances.”

Emma adds: “He is full of faith and loves the joy the gospel brings him. Having found the restored gospel as an adult, he appreciates the difference it makes in one’s life as a source of light and joy.”

Jean B. Bingham, former Relief Society General President, describes Elder Kearon as calm under pressure. She recalls a time when she, Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Elder Kearon, and others found themselves stranded abroad during a political uprising. Under Elder Bednar’s direction, Elder Kearon spent hours on a satellite phone working with local officials and Church representatives to create a path for their removal.

“His calm nature, focused efforts, and inspired insights produced a solution that allowed for our safe departure,” says Sister Bingham.

In December 2021, the family was shocked to learn that Sister Kearon had been diagnosed with breast cancer.

“I never thought cancer was going to hit me or us,” says Sister Kearon. She called the ensuing treatment extremely difficult, but the Savior was her source of strength through it all. “I’m still on oral chemotherapy, but I’m grateful to say that I’m cancer free as far as doctors can tell.”

Elder Kearon says: “Jen has been steadfast and impeccably faithful through it all. We give thanks every day for her health, and we give thanks for the exceptional care she’s been given.”

As with other trials she and her husband have experienced, Sister Kearon says, “Life serves us things we simply don’t want to do. We don’t like them. We didn’t

Elder Kearon calls his daughters—Lizzie (pictured with husband, Jonathan), Susannah, and Emma—“the most beautiful light in our lives, our greatest treasures.”



ask for them. But we have to face them anyway. The best way to deal with things that are just plain hard is to turn to the Lord and ask for His strength, putting our faith in Jesus Christ and in His grace and power. A long time ago, I learned a lot about how the Savior succors us at our deepest, darkest times.”

Elder and Sister Kearon acquired that sacred knowledge after the birth of their first child, Sean.

“The Rock of the Atonement of Jesus Christ”

During Sister Kearon’s first pregnancy, the couple learned early on from ultrasound scans that their baby boy

Elder Kearon greets members in the Europe East Area (below) and speaks to the news media a month after his calling as an Apostle (bottom).



had “a difficult heart anomaly, a life-threatening condition,” says Elder Kearon. “We spent the rest of the pregnancy tracking down the best doctors, cardiologists, and cardiac surgeons equipped to address his particular problem. We found a world-class team in London, and they were confident they could fix the problem.”

Surgeons operated on Sean when he was 19 days old. The surgery was long and painstaking. Afterward, says Elder Kearon, “Sean’s little heart could not restart. So, we lost him. His death was exquisitely painful. This was not the result we had fasted for, prayed for, and pled for, but we knew that heaven’s hand was in that experience.”

Sister Kearon says, “God led us through those months of pregnancy and the beautiful, brief life of our son in a way that, at the end of it, we knew we had done everything we could for him. That was a tremendous comfort.”

Healing came from an increased understanding of the Savior’s Atonement and Resurrection that Sister Kearon gained from an in-depth study of 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi. “In the grief of our loss, I felt like I was spinning in a black hole,” she says. “And yet, time after time, that free fall was arrested by the rock of the Atonement of Jesus Christ—because it is true. His grace, His living reality, make even the most painful losses bearable and hopeful.”

Healing came from the birth of the couple’s three daughters. “They brought healing with them,” Elder Kearon says. “They are the most beautiful light in our lives, our greatest treasures.”

Healing came from the words of inspired Church leaders, including a general conference talk by Elder Lance B. Wickman,⁵ in which Elder Wickman shared the pain of pacing deserted hospital corridors as his own little boy lay dying of a childhood disease. “Elder Wickman teaches that ‘believing is seeing’ and that faith is trust in the Lord,” says Elder Kearon. “His talk was enormously valuable to me because of his clear understanding of such an experience. This was magnified by the number of times I read it and listened to it.”

And healing came from ministering to others in their loss—be they refugees in Europe,⁶ the abused or oppressed,⁷ or fellow Church leaders like Elder Paul V. Johnson of the Presidency of the Seventy, who had lost a daughter to cancer two months before joining Elder Kearon in the Europe Area Presidency in 2015.

“He and Sister Kearon were wonderful in helping us in that grieving and healing time,” Elder Johnson says. “They were so sensitive to our situation. I’ve always loved them for that.”



Elder and Sister Kearon's love and respect for each other allows them to work united in faith.

Such is the way of discipleship. We bear one another's burdens. We mourn with those who mourn. We comfort those in need of comfort. And we stand as witnesses of God—and the eternal promise of joyful reunions made possible through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. (See Mosiah 18:8–9.)

Then, when trying times come to us, that healing love and ministering balm are reciprocated. As an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, Elder Kearon is prepared to share with all the world that gospel message of hope, healing, and peace.

“Why do difficult trials happen to us?” Elder Kearon asks. “Because we come to earth to learn, to grow, to be sanctified, and to love and trust our Father in Heaven and our Savior. For now, we can't see Them, and They can't hold us. But the blessings of the Savior's Atonement are infinite—infinite!” ■

NOTES

1. Elder W. Rolfe Kerr was granted emeritus status in 2007.
2. Patrick Kearon, “A More Wonderful World” (Brigham Young University commencement address, Apr. 25, 2019), 1, 2, speeches.byu.edu.
3. See Patrick Kearon, “Come unto Me with Full Purpose of Heart, and I Shall Heal You,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 50.
4. Patrick Kearon, “A Hallmark of the Lord's True and Living Church” (worldwide devotional for young adults, May 6, 2018), broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
5. See Lance B. Wickman, “But If Not,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2002, 30–32; Elder Wickman was granted emeritus status in 2010.
6. See Patrick Kearon, “Refuge from the Storm,” *Liahona*, May 2016, 111–14.
7. See Patrick Kearon, “He Is Risen with Healing in His Wings: We Can Be More Than Conquerors,” *Liahona*, May 2022, 37–39.

As an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, Elder Kearon is prepared to share with all the world the gospel message of hope, healing, and peace.



Elder David L. Buckner

General Authority Seventy

Elder David L. Buckner was born on September 27, 1963, in Ogden, Utah, USA, but “grew up” while he lived for three years in Sacramento, California, USA.

The youngest of Melba and E. LaMar Buckner’s five children, 11-year-old David moved to California with his family when his father was called to preside over the Church’s mission in Sacramento. Away from well-established friends in Utah, he learned how to make new friends and found “300 older brothers and sisters” among the full-time missionaries.

Most important, his testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ took root. “That mission experience changed everything for me,” he said.

Later he served in the Ecuador Guayaquil Mission. Just three months into his mission, while serving as branch president in the town of Jipijapa, he mourned with branch members and others after an 11-year-old boy drowned while participating in a Church activity.

As he pleaded with Heavenly Father in the weeks and months that followed, he gained an unshakable testimony of the plan of salvation. He also witnessed the Lord’s compassion as others in the community embraced the gospel. Together they came to understand the sacred nature of life and the power of the Lord’s grace.

After his mission, Elder Buckner attended Brigham Young University, where he met Jennifer Romney Jackson. They married on August 30, 1990, in the Salt Lake Temple. Sister Buckner grew up in New York, USA, where the couple moved after their marriage. They raised their five children in Manhattan, where Elder Buckner represented the Church on the prominent Commission of Religious Leaders.

Elder Buckner received a bachelor of science degree in finance from BYU in 1988 and a master of business administration degree from Durham University in 1991. He also received a master of international relations from BYU in 1995 and a juris doctorate from BYU in 1996. He has been a college professor and, since 1999, president of Bottom Line Training and Consulting Inc. Elder Buckner has served as Area Seventy, stake president, high councilor, and bishop. ■



Elder Gregorio E. Casillas

General Authority Seventy

Gregorio Enrique Casillas was born in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico, on August 26, 1975. He lived there until he served as a full-time missionary in the Mexico Tampico Mission.

He and Alma Angelina Obeso Gonzalez were sealed in the San Diego California Temple in June 1999. They are the parents of three children.

Before the two were married, they lived 100 miles (161 km) apart while he studied in Tijuana, and she studied in Mexicali. In the months before their marriage, they prayed and fasted to know where to live and start their family. Elder Casillas remembers the feeling he had from the Holy Ghost.

“I remember while we were fasting, hearing the Lord say, ‘If your mountain is La Rumorosa [a large mountain located between the two cities], I will take it away,’” Elder Casillas said.

He said the Lord cleared the path for the couple to be in Mexicali when the university there unexpectedly accepted him as a transfer student.

In Mexicali, “we met people we needed to meet. And we served in callings where we needed to serve,” he said.

This experience set a pattern for their life together. “When we put God first, all other things find their place,” Elder Casillas said. “It requires a little bit of faith and a little bit of action, and then the Lord extends His hand to bless us.”

Elder Casillas earned a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering from the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California. He also earned a master of business administration from Xochicalco University. He has worked in construction project management and most recently as area temple facilities manager for the Church’s Mexico Area.

Elder Casillas has served as an Area Seventy, mission president over the Mexico Mexico City South Mission, stake president, bishop, high councilor, elders quorum president, and ward Young Men president. ■



Elder Aroldo B. Cavalcante

General Authority Seventy

At the invitation of a cousin, 18-year-old Aroldo B. Cavalcante attended a regional conference in 1988 featuring President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), then serving as First Counselor in the First Presidency.

“I felt something very strong,” he recounted. “I could see a light in President Hinckley.”

Though he attended church for the next three years, he wasn’t baptized. One day missionaries knocked on his door. Holding their area book, they read what past missionaries had written about him. What struck him was the last sentence: “He doesn’t want to commit to Jesus Christ.”

Elder Cavalcante recounted, “I thought I was very committed to Jesus Christ, and that line was too strong for me.”

Wondering whether that was what the Savior also thought of him, he asked, “What can I do to change this, Elders?”

The missionaries started teaching him, and the 21-year-old was baptized just 10 days later. Elder Cavalcante has been committed to the Savior’s gospel ever since.

“This work is not about us. It’s about the Savior. And I try to do my very best for Him, not for me,” said Elder Cavalcante.

Aroldo Barreto Cavalcante Filho was born on November 22, 1970, in Fortaleza, Ceará, Brazil. He was sealed to Christiana Ramalho Bezerra Leite in the Recife Brazil Temple on January 21, 2004. They are the parents of four children.

Elder Cavalcante received a postgraduate degree in administrative law from the Federal University of Ceará in 1997. He has worked as an attorney for Procuradoria Geral do Município from 1997 to 2005 and as managing partner of Barreto Cavalcante Advogados since 1999.

Before his call as a General Authority Seventy, Elder Cavalcante had been serving as a mission president in Brazil. He has also served as an Area Seventy, stake president, bishop, and bishopric counselor. ■



Elder I. Raymond Egbo

General Authority Seventy

While he was attending a religious boarding school in Nigeria, Elder I. Raymond Egbo’s older sister kept inviting him to “come and see” what The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had to offer. At 14 years old, he started going to seminary in the evenings.

While reading the seminary course of study, Elder Egbo came to Doctrine and Covenants 135 and the martyrdom of Joseph Smith.

“Something powerfully touched me, and I knew that the Prophet Joseph Smith was a prophet of God. I knew he was killed for the truth,” said Elder Egbo, who soon joined the Church. “I still feel right now how I felt that day when I read it.”

Later, while he was a university student, his sister encouraged him to serve a mission. Their father was angry with him for leaving his studies, but Elder Egbo regularly wrote him letters describing everything he was doing and what he was teaching.

To Elder Egbo’s amazement, near the end of his mission, his mission president read to him a letter from his father that said he had been baptized. “Tell him I will be waiting for him,” his father wrote.

Elder Idyo Raymond Egbo was born in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria, on June 25, 1974, to Udo Idio Egbo and Veronica Ukamaka Egbo. He met Comfort Ikip Ese when her family moved into his branch in 1994. They were married on May 15, 2003, in Calabar, Nigeria. They have three children.

Elder Egbo has degrees in education, regional planning, and business administration from three universities. He has worked in Seminaries and Institutes of Religion since 2002 in a variety of positions, including as country director and area director.

At the time of his call, Elder Egbo was serving as an Area Seventy in the Africa West Area. He has served as president of the Nigeria Calabar Mission and has been a stake presidency counselor and high councilor. He served a full-time mission in the Nigeria Lagos Mission. ■



Elder D. Martin Goury

General Authority Seventy

Growing up in a small village in Côte d’Ivoire, Elder D. Martin Goury dreamed of becoming a clergyman and serving others.

In October 1992, while in London, England, learning English and getting an education, he met Latter-day Saint missionaries. The missionaries, one of whom was the only native French-speaking missionary in London, gave Elder Goury a copy of the Book of Mormon in French.

He started reading the book and soon received a witness of its truthfulness. When a new pair of missionaries came to his apartment a few months later, he joined the Church. “I remember being very happy,” he said.

His joy increased as the missionaries taught him about the priesthood. “They explained the meaning of the priesthood and how I could use that to serve other people. For me, that was my dream coming true,” Elder Goury said. “I was delighted.”

Dalébé Martin Goury was born on January 30, 1964, to Yoro Goury Maurice and Bame Gaby Odette. He grew up in a village called Lehipa and the cities of Oume and Gagnoa. He married Ruth Simone Kennington in the London England Temple on April 8, 1995. They live in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, and have four children.

Elder Goury earned bachelor’s degrees in teaching from CAFOP (Animation and Educational Training Centers) de Man in 1988 and mechanical engineering from London South Bank University in 1997. He has worked as a primary school teacher, design engineer, senior project manager and deputy project director for Cameron, general manager of Nigeria operations for OneSubsea Services, and country operations manager for Schlumberger. Recently, Elder Goury worked for the Church as a leader and member support coordinator.

He was serving as an Area Seventy in the Africa West Area at the time of his call. He previously served as president of the Benin Cotonou Mission, bishop, bishopric counselor, branch president, and elders quorum president. ■



Elder Karl D. Hirst

General Authority Seventy

Elder Karl D. Hirst considers himself “an ordinary person in an extraordinary calling.”

The new General Authority Seventy sees his testimony and its confirmations as somewhat ordinary as well. “No visitations, absolutely nothing spectacularly spiritual—and I have stopped worrying about that because I am so fulfilled by the way God has chosen to speak to me, even if He chooses to speak to other people in a different way,” Elder Hirst said. “It is not spectacular, but it is abundant.”

Elder Hirst’s father, Jack, ran a humble corner shop. He learned of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints through customers and joined the Church several years after Karl was born on February 28, 1972, in Bury, Lancashire, England.

Elder Hirst’s testimony of Jesus Christ began when he learned stories of the Savior and sang hymns while attending Sunday School in another church as a child with his mother, Vivien Ruth Meakin Hirst, and grandmother.

Young Karl later attended Latter-day Saint meetings and received an invitation from a Primary teacher to be baptized, which he accepted at age 10. Through five-plus decades of life, Elder Hirst has maintained his childlike faith and testimony.

“God has spoken to me in my heart in the same way He did when I was in Primary and in the same way He did when I was in Sunday School,” Elder Hirst said.

He married Claire Elizabeth Wright on May 29, 1993, in Burnley, Lancashire. They were sealed later that day in the London England Temple.

Elder Hirst received a bachelor of law degree in 1996 from Lancaster University and a master of business administration degree from Alliance Manchester Business School in 2016. Since 1997, he has worked as a barrister (lawyer).

The parents of six children, the Hirsts were residing in Bolsover, Chesterfield, England, and serving as For the Strength of Youth session directors at the time of his call. ■



Elder Christopher H. Kim

General Authority Seventy

When Elder Christopher H. Kim was 14 years old and had a chance to share the gospel with friends, he realized he needed to know the truth of the Book of Mormon so he could speak with conviction.

“As I prayed about the Book of Mormon, I felt a soul-comforting feeling,” he recalls. “And suddenly, there was not any question or any doubt about the Book of Mormon.” For the first time in his life, he added, “I really felt the Spirit, knew the truth about the Book of Mormon, and knew that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God.”

Christopher Hyunsu Kim was born November 18, 1965, in Daegu, South Korea, the oldest of four children of Chinho Kim and Kuncha Kim. His parents joined the Church when he was an infant. Elder Kim lived in Daegu until he graduated from high school and his family immigrated to the United States, settling in Southern California.

While he was serving in the Washington Seattle Mission, Sister Seongmi (Sue) Hong was serving in the California Los Angeles Mission. While there, she got to know Elder Kim’s mother. Later, after Elder Kim and Sister Hong had completed their missions, they began dating. They were married on December 7, 1991, in the Los Angeles California Temple. They have one son and three daughters.

Elder Kim graduated from Brigham Young University with a bachelor’s degree in sociology in 1995 and a master of business administration in 1997. After his schooling, he worked in the United States, Thailand, and South Korea. Since 2005, he has been employed by Unicity International, a Utah-based nutritional products and cosmetics supplier, most recently as president of global markets, based in Seoul, South Korea.

Elder Kim has served since 2019 as an Area Seventy. He has also served as a stake president, stake presidency counselor, stake mission president, and high councilor. ■



Elder Sandino Roman

General Authority Seventy

Elder Sandino Roman was introduced to the gospel of Jesus Christ as a child. Each Sunday a friend of his mother brought him and his sister to meet with the 15 other members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in a small meetinghouse in Mexico.

The five-year-old prayed every day that his family would become converted to the gospel. Two years later, his mother and father were baptized. One year after that, his father baptized him. “For that reason, I know that the Lord hears children’s prayers,” Elder Roman said.

Embracing the gospel and serving in the Church has had a transformative effect on his family. “I’ve seen the end result that the gospel brings into lives,” Elder Roman said. “I know it brings happiness and hope.”

Sandino Roman was born on August 7, 1973, to Lidia Corral and Prometeo Roman in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico. While playing on the volleyball team of the Church-owned Benemérito de las Américas high school, Roman met Guadalupe Villanueva Rojas. They were sealed in the Mexico City Mexico Temple on December 19, 1998. They have four children.

Elder Roman received a bachelor of science degree in computer systems from ITESM (the Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education) in 2000 and a master of business administration from Brigham Young University in 2006. He has worked as a marketing manager for Johnson & Johnson and for the Church as the manager of the Mexico Area Support Services Office.

At the time of his call, he and his wife were serving as leaders of the Ecuador Quito North Mission. Elder Roman has also served as an Area Seventy, stake presidency counselor, bishop, high councilor, and elders quorum president.

Elder Roman said his main goal in life, wherever he serves, is to earn the trust of the Lord. “I want Him to know He can trust me to do this work,” he said. ■



Elder Steven D. Shumway

General Authority Seventy

Two years into his work at Exxon Chemical Co. in Houston, Texas, USA, Elder Steven D. Shumway learned that his parents had been called to preside over a mission in Bolivia and needed help with the family business in Arizona.

“I don’t want to put pressure on you to come back,” his father said to him. “But if you don’t come back, I worry about what will happen to the business.”

It was a difficult decision to make, said Elder Shumway.

He and his wife traveled five hours to the Dallas Texas Temple and spent the day there without receiving an answer. Afterward, they visited a bookstore and spotted the biography of President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), *Go Forward with Faith*.

“Both of us felt the Lord say, ‘You need to go forward with faith in my way, not in your way,’” Elder Shumway said. “And so we moved to Arizona, which has turned out to be one of the most significant and beautiful changes in our lives.”

One of the best things they have learned in their marriage, Elder Shumway said, is that “when you accept [the Lord’s] invitation, you prosper. You progress. Things are better than if you try to do things your way.”

Steven D. Shumway was born on June 30, 1970, in Springerville, Arizona, USA, to Wilford Douglas and Dixie Ann Shumway, and grew up in Eager, Arizona. He married Heidi O’Brien in the Salt Lake Temple on December 29, 1994. They are the parents of four children and live in Pinetop, Arizona.

Elder Shumway earned a degree in chemical engineering from Brigham Young University in 1996, worked at Exxon Chemical Co. from 1996 to 1998, and has been the president and CEO of Whiting Brothers Investment Co. since 1998.

At the time of his call, he was serving as an Area Authority Seventy. He has served as president of the Illinois Chicago Mission, stake president, bishop, elders quorum president, stake mission preparation teacher, and full-time missionary in the Pennsylvania Philadelphia Mission. ■



Elder Michael B. Strong

General Authority Seventy

Elder Michael B. Strong’s gospel learning began at home, where he was taught by his parents.

“My testimony has just grown and become stronger and stronger over time, almost in imperceptible ways,” Elder Strong said. As he looks back, “I’ve seen God’s hand so frequently in my life, but it has been punctuated by several very deep spiritual and profound experiences.”

As he and his wife have raised their family, they’ve been deliberate in incorporating the gospel into their lives. “We’ve tried to make it so the gospel is just woven into the fabric of our lives,” Elder Strong said. “It is who we are.”

Elder Strong received a bachelor of science degree in microbiology with a minor in chemistry from Brigham Young University in 1989 and a medical degree from Baylor College of Medicine in 1993.

He has been a physician and, at the time of his call, was working as chief medical information officer for the University of Utah.

Elder Strong has found that when he has encountered problems, including those in his profession, he has been guided to solutions as he has made those challenges a matter of prayer. “I could just feel the Lord giving me ideas and making solutions become apparent to me that I would not have otherwise seen,” he said. “I’ve come to realize that He truly cares about us.”

At the time of his call as a General Authority Seventy, Elder Strong was serving as an Area Seventy in the Utah Area. He has also served as president of the Perú Lima Central Mission, stake president, bishop, and full-time missionary in the Bolivia Cochabamba Mission.

Michael Brent Strong was born in Salt Lake City on August 6, 1965. He married Cristin Connelly on August 22, 1987, in the Salt Lake Temple. They are the parents of six children. Elder and Sister Strong reside in Centerville, Utah, USA. ■



Elder Sergio R. Vargas

General Authority Seventy

When Elder Sergio R. Vargas fell in love with Andrea Sanchez, he thought he had a simple solution to their religious differences: they would have one wedding in his church for his family and another wedding in her church for her family.

He quickly learned, however, that doing so would not be that easy. Andrea was a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and she wanted a temple marriage. So she invited him to learn more about her faith from the missionaries.

Elder Vargas accepted the invitation, which changed his life.

He recalled working for a salmon company at the time, helping transport live fish by sea. During a 25-hour voyage, he found a private place to read the Book of Mormon and ask Heavenly Father about the gospel. It was a spiritual turning point.

Elder Vargas was born on November 2, 1976, in Puerto Varas, Chile, where he and his two siblings were raised. His mother, Gladys Barria, kept the home while his father, Renato Vargas, kept the peace as a police officer. Despite encounters with missionaries as a young man, he was more interested in playing basketball than learning the gospel.

It was not until Elder Vargas met Sister Vargas that he was prepared to hear the missionaries with an open mind and heart, he said. They were married on July 26, 2003, and were later sealed in the Santiago Chile Temple. The couple has three children.

When called as a General Authority Seventy, Elder Vargas was serving as an Area Seventy in the South America South Area. His previous Church callings include high councilor, branch president, and stake president.

Elder Vargas completed a bachelor's degree in marine resources from Los Lagos University in 1999 and received a business administration diploma from Austral University in 2002. Most recently, he worked as a production and operational manager for Ventisqueros, a member of the German Schörghuber Corporate Group. ■



President Paul V. Johnson

Sunday School General President

From his career as a seminary teacher to the nine years he spent as Church commissioner of education, incoming Sunday School General President Paul V. Johnson has had plenty of gospel-teaching experience. But the most important quality he brings to his new calling, he says, is “my love for my Heavenly Father and the Savior and my love for young people and other people too.”

President Johnson was born on June 24, 1954, in Gainesville, Florida, USA, to Vere Johnson and Winifred Amacher. Before he was a year old, his parents moved to Logan, Utah, USA, where they raised him and his seven siblings.

He got to know his future wife, Jill Washburn, when he was recruited to play high school football in Monticello, Utah, by a former coach who had moved there from Logan. Paul and Jill had met earlier, but now they became friends while attending the same ward and seminary class. Sister Johnson wrote to him while he served a full-time mission in Norway.

They were married on August 18, 1976, in the Logan Utah Temple. They have 9 children and 43 grandchildren.

The Johnsons have faced their share of trials together, from losing a daughter to cancer to struggling through their own health challenges. But President Johnson said those experiences have shaped his perspective of God's plan. “I think it makes me, as a teacher, yearn to help young people grasp on to the Savior and on to their Heavenly Father,” he said.

President Johnson earned a bachelor's degree in zoology in 1977 and a master's degree in counseling and guidance in 1978, both from Brigham Young University. He earned a doctor of education degree from Utah State University in 1989.

President Johnson was sustained as a General Authority Seventy in April 2005 and has been serving as a member of the Presidency of the Seventy since August 1, 2021. He has served as a counselor in the Europe Area Presidency, counselor in the Chile Area Presidency, counselor in a stake presidency, and bishop.

He will be given emeritus status, effective August 1, 2024, when he begins his new calling. ■



Brother Chad H Webb

*First Counselor in the Sunday School
General Presidency*

As a young man, Chad Webb was attending the College of Eastern Utah (now Utah State University Eastern) when he had a foundational spiritual experience that deepened his testimony of the gospel. That experience started with a desire to strengthen his faith.

Amid doing schoolwork and playing basketball on his college team, Brother Webb made studying the scriptures, praying, and pondering a priority as he prepared to serve a full-time mission in Veracruz, Mexico.

One cold night he went for a long walk around Price, Utah, and thought about everything he was learning. Heavenly guidance came as he entered an empty parking lot.

“I felt that all the answers to my prayers and questions came, and I felt very deeply how true the gospel and the Church are,” he said. “Those truths came with great clarity in my mind, along with the feeling that Heavenly Father was aware of me. I felt His love and His direction. That was one of the early impactful experiences I had to deepen my testimony.”

Chad H Webb was born in Rexburg, Idaho, USA, on December 18, 1964, to Larry George Webb and Paige Webb. He grew up in southeastern Idaho and married Kristi Ann Bronson in the Logan Utah Temple on August 4, 1990. They live in Layton, Utah, USA, and have six children.

Brother Webb graduated from Brigham Young University with a bachelor’s degree in Spanish and a master’s degree in educational leadership and foundations. He taught seminary classes in Salt Lake City and institute classes in Virginia and Utah, coordinated institute programs in Washington, D.C., and supervised training and selection of seminary teachers. Since 2008, he has served as an administrator of Seminaries and Institutes of Religion.

Brother Webb was released as Layton Utah Valley View Stake president shortly before his call. Previous callings include bishop, high councilor, and elders quorum president. ■



Brother Gabriel W. Reid

*Second Counselor in the Sunday School
General Presidency*

For Gabriel W. Reid, one of the most rewarding parts of being a mission leader is to see missionaries “feast upon the words of Christ,” develop a love for the scriptures, and desire to become more like the Savior.

“If you truly figure out how to make your gospel study ‘delicious’ to you, as it says in the scriptures [see Alma 32:28], that’s when your life changes,” said Brother Reid, who concludes his service as president of the Australia Sydney Mission in July.

Brother Reid was born in Pago Pago, American Samoa. He speaks Samoan, Spanish, and English. In Samoan, he said, the word *feast* in the Book of Mormon is translated as “taumamafa fiafia” and in Spanish as “deleitar.” He said both words denote enjoyment.

As a counselor in the new Sunday School General Presidency, “I’m excited to help others see how much joy there is in unpacking the scriptures,” he said.

Gabriel “Gabe” Walter Po’u Reid was born on May 28, 1977, to Eugene and Tupu Reid and raised in the village of Leone in American Samoa. His love of God and desire to put Him first began at an early age and sustained him as he played football for Brigham Young University from 1999 to 2002 and then pursued a career in the National Football League from 2003 to 2006.

During that time of his life, he learned a valuable lesson: “When the Lord tells you something, you go ‘all in.’”

Brother Reid married Heather Lynn Sasse in the Bountiful Utah Temple on June 24, 2000. They have four children. He graduated from BYU in 2002 with a bachelor’s degree in international relations. Today he owns a construction management company.

In addition to presiding over the Australia Sydney Mission, Brother Reid has served as a stake presidency counselor, high councilor, bishop, ward Young Men president, temple ordinance worker, and full-time missionary in the Chile Santiago South Mission from 1996 to 1998. ■

Statistical Report, 2023

For the information of the members of the Church, the First Presidency has issued the following statistical report concerning the growth and status of the Church as of December 31, 2023.

CHURCH UNITS	
Stakes	3,565
Missions	414
Districts	489
Wards and Branches	31,490
CHURCH MEMBERSHIP	
Total Membership	17,255,394
New Children of Record during 2023	93,594
Converts Baptized during 2023	251,763
MISSIONARIES	
Full-Time Teaching Missionaries	67,871
Senior Church-Service Missionaries	27,801
Young Church-Service Missionaries	3,884
TEMPLES	
Temples in Operation (includes the following temples under renovation or reconstruction: Manti Utah, Salt Lake, Stockholm Sweden, and San Diego California)	186
Temples under Construction	55
Temples Announced	94

Progress on New Temples Continues

During the Sunday afternoon session of the April 2024 general conference, President Russell M. Nelson announced 15 new temples. See the locations of the temples in his address on page 122.

The following temples have been dedicated or rededicated since the last general conference in October 2023:

- The McAllen Texas (USA) Temple was dedicated on October 8, 2023.
- The Feather River California (USA) Temple was dedicated on October 8, 2023.
- The Bangkok Thailand Temple was dedicated on October 22, 2023.
- The Okinawa Japan Temple was dedicated on November 12, 2023.
- The St. George Utah (USA) Temple was rededicated on December 10, 2023.
- The Lima Peru Los Olivos Temple was dedicated on January 14, 2024.
- The Orem Utah (USA) Temple was dedicated on January 21, 2024.
- The Red Cliffs Utah (USA) Temple was dedicated on March 24, 2024.

The Manti Utah (USA) Temple was rededicated on April 21. The Urdaneta Philippines Temple was dedicated on April 28.

Ground was broken for the following temples: Modesto California (USA) Temple, Fort Worth Texas (USA) Temple, Kaohsiung Taiwan Temple, Knoxville Tennessee (USA) Temple, San Luis Potosí Mexico Temple. ■



From top: President Russell M. Nelson speaks with Navajo Nation president Dr. Buu Nygren during a visit in the Church Administration Building on February 15, 2024; President Dallin H. Oaks and his wife, Kristen, share a story with seven of their great-grandchildren during the Friend to Friend broadcast in March; (left to right) Elder Jonathan S. Schmitt of the Seventy and his wife, Alexis, Elder Patrick Kearon of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and his wife, Jennifer, President Henry B. Eyring, and Elder Kevin W. Pearson, Utah Area President, and his wife, June, at the dedication of the Red Cliffs Utah Temple.

Ministry of the First Presidency

In a social media message posted on February 14, 2024, **President Russell M. Nelson** invited all to use Valentine’s Day as a reminder to recommit to loving their neighbor. President Nelson said the day is one when people all over the world celebrate love. While love can at times be about flowers, chocolate, and gifts, “the second great commandment teaches of a different kind of love—that of actively loving our neighbor.”

On February 15, President Nelson and his counselors welcomed Navajo Nation president Dr. Buu Nygren and his wife, First Lady Jasmine Blackwater-Nygren, to Temple Square. Dr. Nygren is committed to bringing basic necessities such as water, power, and good roads to every Navajo home. In recent years, the Church of Jesus Christ has helped bring some of those things to the Navajo Nation.

During the Friend to Friend broadcast on March 9, **President Dallin H. Oaks**, First Counselor in the First Presidency, and his wife, Kristen, spoke with seven of their great-grandchildren who are of Primary age about how to hear the Holy Ghost and what the Holy Ghost does—warns, comforts, testifies, guides, teaches, and more.

“Disciples of Jesus Christ listen to Jesus Christ,” President Oaks said. “Sometimes He gives us a feeling, sometimes a thought. Sometimes we hear His voice. President Nelson, our prophet, has asked us to listen to our Savior and hear Him.”

After 61 years of marriage, **President Henry B. Eyring**, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, bid a temporary farewell to his wife, Kathleen, who passed away on October 15, 2023. President Eyring has said, “Kathleen has always been a person that made me want to be the very best that I can be.”

On March 24, President Eyring dedicated the Red Cliffs Utah Temple in St. George, Utah, USA. “You will find a joy in your service here that is available in no other way,” he said during the dedicatory services. ■

Church Acquires Kirtland Temple, Other Properties

On March 5, 2024, the responsibility and ownership for the Kirtland Temple in Ohio, several historic buildings in Nauvoo, Illinois, and various manuscripts and artifacts officially transferred from Community of Christ to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for an agreed-upon amount.

The Kirtland Temple was dedicated in 1836 (see Doctrine and Covenants 109–110), but the Saints had to abandon it not long after because of persecution. Following the recent transfer of ownership, the temple was closed for a short time but was then reopened on March 25 for public tours at no charge. It will remain a historic building.

Likewise, in Nauvoo the Smith Family Homestead, the Mansion House (Joseph and Emma’s home from 1843 until his death in 1844), and the Red Brick Store (where the Relief Society was founded) also reopened for year-round public tours at no charge. ■



Behind the Scenes

Language Interpretation for General Conference

An hour before each session of general conference, hundreds of language specialists gather in a large room to put the polishing touches on the conference addresses that have been translated and will be interpreted into one of 103 languages.

Once conference begins, they get one chance. It must be good, and it must be good the first time. Effective interpretation requires cadence, inflection, clear articulation, and language proficiency, while conveying the emotion and intent of the speaker at the pulpit in the same spirit that the message was created.

More than 800 native speakers and returned missionaries interpreted portions of this general conference. About half delivered the messages from Salt Lake City, while the other half delivered their interpretations from their native countries. Some also participate in the translation of conference addresses in the weeks prior to general conference.

During the broadcast, interpreters, usually working in teams of four to six per session, read each message in a sound-dampened booth in the Church Office Building or in designated locations around the world. Wearing headsets to hear the proceedings in English, interpreters watch a monitor to time their interpretation with the speaker. Interpreters must keep two conversations—in different languages—going at the same time in their heads.

Interpreter Jonas Prasad says Hindi-speaking Church members in Fiji are eager to hear the prophets in their language. Describing one sister, he said, “For years, the only Church meetings available to her were held in English. Though she didn’t speak a word, she came and sat quietly just to feel the Spirit. Now she thrills to hear the gospel in her language.” ■

Activity Ideas

There are many ways teachers can help members learn from and apply general conference messages. Here are a few examples; teachers may have other ideas that will work better in their elders quorum or Relief Society.



- *Apply truths to our lives.* Invite members to review the conference message looking for truths that could help them accomplish the work God has given them as individuals or as an elders quorum or Relief Society. For instance, what do we learn that can help us as ministering brothers and sisters? as parents? as member missionaries? How does this message influence our thoughts, feelings, and actions?
- *Discuss in groups.* Divide members into small groups, and assign each group a different section of the conference message to read and discuss. Then ask each group to share a truth they found and how it applies to them. Or you could create groups made up of members who studied different sections of the message and let them share with each other what they found.
- *Look for answers to questions.* Invite the members to answer questions like the following about the conference message: What gospel truths do we find in this message? How can we apply these truths? What invitations and promised blessings were given? What does this message teach us about the work God wants us to do? Or create a few questions of your own that encourage members to think deeply about the message or apply the truths it teaches. Allow members to select one of these questions and find answers in the message.
- *Share statements from the message.* Invite members to share statements from the conference message that inspire them to fulfill their responsibilities in God's work of salvation and exaltation. Encourage them to consider how they could share these statements to bless someone, including loved ones and people they minister to.
- *Share an object lesson.* In advance, invite a few members to bring objects from home that they could use to teach about the conference message. During the meeting, ask the members to explain how those objects relate to the message and how the message applies to their lives.
- *Prepare a lesson to teach at home.* Ask members to work in pairs to plan a home evening lesson based on the conference message. They could answer questions like these: How could we make the message relevant to our families? How could we share this message with people we minister to?
- *Share experiences.* Read together several statements from the conference message. Ask members to share examples from the scriptures and from their lives that illustrate or reinforce the doctrine taught in these statements.
- *Find a phrase.* Invite members to search the conference message looking for phrases that are meaningful to them. Ask them to share the phrases and what they learn from them. Ask them to share how these teachings help them accomplish the Lord's work.

For more ideas on how to study and teach from general conference messages, see "Ideas for Learning and Teaching from General Conference." (Click "Ideas for Study" under "General Conference" in the Gospel Library.)

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"My dear brothers and sisters, here is my promise," said President Russell M. Nelson during the 194th Annual General Conference of the Church. "Nothing will help you *more* to hold fast to the iron rod than worshipping in the temple as regularly as your circumstances permit. Nothing will protect you *more* as you encounter the world's mists of darkness. Nothing will bolster your testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Atonement or help you understand God's magnificent plan *more*. Nothing will soothe your spirit *more* during times of pain. Nothing will open the heavens *more*. Nothing!"

