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The Gospel Answers Life's Problems and Challenges

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Elder Perry: We're excited to address the subject today of answering life's problems and challenges that come through applying the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our Church Presidents have given us great hope in the past to fulfill the answers of these challenges and problems in the gospel. I've just selected two of those for us to consider here today. The first is from President Spencer W. Kimball speaking in April conference in 1980. He said: "May I remind all of us that if we will live the gospel and follow the counsel of the leaders of the Church, we will be blessed to avoid many of the problems that plague the world. The Lord knows the challenges we face. If we keep his commandments, we will be entitled to the wisdom and blessings of heaven in solving them" ("A Deep Commitment to the Principles of Welfare Service," *Ensign*, May 1980, 92).

Brothers and sisters, I know the gospel is true. It answers all of life's questions and problems that face us. Now, from President Ezra Taft Benson speaking to the missionaries: "I testify to you that we have the answers to the problems of the world. We know where we're going. We're on our way, and the Lord is directing His work through a prophet of God with special witnesses bearing testimony to the divinity of [our] Lord [and Savior], who is the God of this world, under the Father. We cannot fail in this work" ("Keys to Successful Member-Missionary Work," *Ensign*, Sept. 1990, 7).

With the assurance of the prophets of God, it is clear that the course is well marked for us to apply the gospel of Jesus Christ in our lives. Elder Christofferson and I have decided to use a question-and-answer format for presenting and using three questions in applying the gospel through service, through rescuing, and through honoring. Of course, I will present the questions and Elder Christofferson will answer them.

It will be just a brief response in hopes that you will go forward and seek further knowledge and understanding from these questions. First, service. We apply the gospel by serving our fellowman as the Savior demonstrated in His life ministry. First, we must understand where the world places us and who we are. So the first question: Are Mormons Christians?

Elder Christofferson: Yes. Well, you've said that the answers to life's challenges and problems come from the gospel and applying the gospel, which means following the teachings and the commandments and the example of Christ. And I think that it's in this Christlike conduct and service that we present our best and most persuasive argument of our own Christianity. I know that there are those who contend that we don't fit their particular definition of Christian orthodoxy. So be it. But our example should be such that no one can deny that the Latter-day Saints love the Savior. No one can deny that the Latter-day Saints seek to emulate the Savior. And so we demonstrate, I think, by our actions. As the

Savior said, "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20). I happen to live, by the way, in a wonderful ward where this is really the environment and the pattern of life.

One quick example. Amy has five children, is expecting a sixth, and has had a lot of illness herself during this pregnancy. Tiffany probably has more children at home right now than anybody else in the ward. But Tiffany makes it a point, from time to time, of taking Amy's children to be with her for a while and giving Amy some time alone to rest and recuperate. That's a simple example, but I think if you multiply that hundreds and thousands of times, that's what it means for us to be a Christian.

Elder Perry: Well, I think I'll give you an A on that answer. Thank you.

Elder Christofferson: Thank you.

Elder Perry: Next question. What effect does rendering service have in our own lives?

Elder Christofferson: Well, the focus in service always has to be outward. We're thinking of what we can do to help others, but there's no denying that it has an effect on us at the same time. There's something about empathy and compassion, I believe, that changes our perspective, that adds courage and strength, I think, to deal with our own needs. It refines us. It sanctifies us. President Marion G. Romney said once, you'll remember, service is not just something we do to get into heaven, but service is the way of life in heaven. You know, it's God's way of life. It's what we do there.

Christ Himself, of course, came not to be ministered unto, He said, but to minister. And I'm thinking—I marked this before I came in—the words from Amulek. In chapter 34 of Alma, he talks about, after prayer and all the other things that are part of our worship and how we live, he said, "After ye have done all these things, if ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and the afflicted, and impart of your substance, if ye have, to those ... in need—I say unto you, if ye do not any of these things, behold, your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing, and

ye are as the hypocrites who do deny the faith" (Alma 34:28).

By the way, the best service, I think, that we render should happen at home. That's where it needs to be the most constant and the most consistent.

Elder Perry: Well, let's try the third question in this section. People of other faiths may share our values. Are there ways we can join with them in Christlike service?

Elder Christofferson: I think that's very natural. There doesn't have to be an agreement on all points of doctrine for us to collaborate with and work with others. My own experience is that I'm a better person through that kind of association. I've had many opportunities in the different places that I've lived around the country and outside the U.S. to work with other groups, people of other faiths and, in some cases, no faith, I suppose, but people of real goodwill. And as I said, I feel like I'm a better man for it. And the Church organization really lends itself to group service. Our quorums and wards and all the organizations really do facilitate and prepare us to lead out and, in some cases, to join others. But we've had a lot of experience with this, as you know, and that's not just on the local level, but internationally all across the world. We've linked with Catholics and evangelicals and Muslims and secular groups and individuals. I believe this really is, as I said, a natural outgrowth of our Christian service and our following Christ in living the gospel.

Elder Perry: Well, all right, let's go to the next section on rescuing then. We apply the gospel by rescuing others in spiritual and temporal needs, again, as the Savior demonstrated. First question: In what way is the rescue effort central to our beliefs?

Elder Christofferson: Well, again, we're talking about the gospel providing the solutions to life's challenges, to our needs. And to me, the key to all of that is the redemptive power of Jesus Christ. We rely on His grace to overcome sin, to overcome suffering, to overcome even death. And part of applying the gospel in our lives, I believe, is to

participate in this redemptive work, His redemptive work, with Him. And that means individually, as parents, as quorums, as wards, as stakes—whatever the case may be. Our effort is to redeem people—help Him redeem people from spiritual needs, but also from temporal needs.

That's all part of the rescue, I think, and as we read in the handbook, for example, the bishops' storehouse is just one example. The bishops' storehouse is all of the goodwill, the talents, the time, the resources of members—whatever they're willing to contribute, to give and help with that redemptive effort. So we've spoken of service. I think this is the ultimate in service, and it's with good reason, I think, that President Monson urges us onward in this. You know in our Thursday meetings in the temple, we conclude with those reports of our activities of the prior week, and it seems without fail, with everything else he may have been doing as President of the Church, there's always something of an individual ministry and an effort to rescue.

He's visited someone in a nursing home. He's given a blessing. He's been at a funeral. He's called someone he knew was lonely. All of that, I think, is a great example of what it means to have this—our participation in the redemptive work of the Lord—as central to our lives.

Elder Perry: Well, let's try what is the role of the priesthood quorum in this rescue effort?

Elder Christofferson: Well, to me, the quorums have a central role, a leadership role. The presidents of quorums, of course, have keys. And they're empowered with their counselors to build a quorum brotherhood and to reach out and include all the members and the families of those quorum members, whether they're active or not, and strengthen them in the gospel covenant. Again, helping them understand how the gospel can be in their lives and assist them in overcoming their challenges.

I don't know; to me, the rescue is really what the oath and covenant of the priesthood means. Magnifying the priesthood and the ordinances that the priesthood performs is central to that

rescue. You've taught frequently about the role of quorums and the ward council in rescuing. Do you want to say anything about that today?

Elder Perry: Well, I love elders quorums and high priests group leaders. They lead the quorums, and those quorums need leadership. All too often we don't give them the proper place in our congregations to understand the great leadership role they have. And I hope that we elevate an understanding of what they're doing in bringing forward the rescue effort in our Father in Heaven's kingdom. And I hope they have longer tenure than they currently experience today.

Elder Christofferson: I agree. I would say, by the way, what the quorums are doing really is equipping people with, again, to understand the gospel and apply the gospel in overcoming life's challenges.

Elder Perry: All right, final question in this phase. Are there similarities in the rescue effort directed toward the less-active members and our missionary outreach to nonmembers?

Elder Christofferson: Well, I'm glad you linked those because I think they are one in the same. In the one case, the effort is directed toward those who have had the gospel in their lives and we're bringing them back to the Savior. And in the other case, it's bringing them to Christ in the first instance. But in the end, it's all the same work. And I would say, by the way, that you're really not saying to people, "Come and start over with your life." In some cases, maybe so, but mostly, generally what we're saying is, "Keep what you've got—all the good that you've built in there over the years and that are part of your life to date—and we'll add the rest. We'll provide the balance of what the Savior provides through His gospel."

Elder Perry: All right, let's take our final section, honoring the covenants we make with God. Your first question: What is the role of temples and temple covenants in empowering us to meet and overcome life's challenges?

Elder Christofferson: Well, in overcoming challenges, I would say the temple and the

ordinances of the temple are the ultimate application of the gospel of Christ. I say to people that one of the blessings of the temple and its ordinances is the perspective that it provides. When we go to the temple, we leave all of our cares and problems and issues and concerns at the door. And when we come back out, they're still there. We have to pick them all up and they haven't changed, but what has changed is ourselves. And we've added spiritual strength, I think, and capacity and a truer perspective on life and what it all means, and maybe the big problems don't seem so big anymore and the little ones that we thought didn't matter, we better deal with it before it does become something too big.

The other thing, though, I think, is there is a divine power associated with those covenants. The Doctrine and Covenants says that in the ordinances of the Melchizedek Priesthood, and I would think particularly those of the temple, the power of godliness is manifest. And among other things, I believe that means there's a godly influence, a divine power that flows into us when we make those covenants and keep them.

So it's a place of renewal. It's a place of revelation. Temples can only fulfill their purpose really if we are prepared. People are sometimes critical about our temple worship, claiming it's unduly secret. But the access is limited not for secrecy, but just to assure preparation. We really need to be prepared and mature spiritually to make those covenants and then to keep them. They're very sacred.

Elder Perry: All right, what is the role of covenants in achieving true conversion?

Elder Christofferson: To me, they're the path of discipleship. The core of all these covenants is obedience and well up to and including sacrifice and consecration, but in a word, obedience. And it produces over time, in my view, this change from natural man to Saint. And I don't believe there's any other way, any other path that that can happen. To me, it produces a great deal of faith in a person to know that he or she has the promise of God, personally, to him or her, individually, apart from anyone else. We make these covenants individually, one by one.

I read some years ago an article in a French newspaper, and it was talking about our work for the dead. And it said what the Mormons do is they take rolls of microfilm and they plunge them in a bucket of water and pull them out and all those people are baptized. I thought, wow, think of all the time we could save. But it doesn't. That's not the way it works, because these covenants are individual, because the promises of God and our promises to Him are person-to-person, one-on-one.

And to me, that produces faith. You have His promise. You know He can't lie. You know He will fulfill His promise, and that, to me, helps us deal with the here and now. Whatever may happen now, we know what's coming in the end, and we can deal with it.

Elder Perry: All right, your final question: What does it mean to practice in honoring our covenants?

Elder Christofferson: I remember one of our Brethren said once, "We go to the temple to make covenants. We go home to keep the covenants." And to me, in practice, keeping covenants is, again, primarily something that happens at home in the marriage and in the family. But we've been discussing the application of the gospel in rescuing and serving and ministering in obedience. To me, all of those things are what it means to keep our covenants. And I would mention especially an ongoing repentance that's facilitated by the sacrament.

If we can prepare ourselves each week with whatever we need to resolve or repent of or confess and deal with in the week prior to Sunday, and then go to the sacrament meeting, partake of those emblems of the Lord's Atonement, blessed in the power of the priesthood, I think that we not only renew the covenants, we receive again the promised remission of sins and the Holy Ghost as our guide through life. That's keeping covenants.

Elder Perry: Well, wouldn't you like to bear your testimony to what we've said?

Elder Christofferson: Thank you. The gospel really does have the answers. It's what we've been

talking about, serving and ministering and ordinances and keeping covenants. And over time, it does transform us. It adds to our capacity over time to deal with problems. It really helps us prevent and avoid, as you quoted from President Kimball, I think it was, avoid a lot of the issues and challenges of life and to draw upon divine assistance. And to me, the key is the gift of the Holy Ghost. We have this blessing, this constant direction and help and comfort and gifts of the Spirit to carry us through life, whatever may come.

That is our tutor in applying the gospel, our guide and our comfort. And my testimony is that the Holy Ghost and His powers are real; that the Lord Jesus Christ and His redemptive power is real; and that God, our Heavenly Father, who loves

and has prepared the way for us through the gospel is indeed our loving Father and He lives. And I bear witness of all of that in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Perry: I join Elder Christofferson in adding my testimony. The gospel has been restored. This is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He is the Head. He leads and guides and directs us in the work in which we have responsibility. This is the dispensation of the fulness of times. He's given us the way, the truth, and the life for us to follow.

I bear solemn witness that He leads and guides and directs us, and He gives us answers to all of life's problems and challenges, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The Doctrinal Importance of Marriage and Children

Elder Russell M. Nelson

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Dear brothers and sisters, we thank you for your faith and devotion in the work of the Lord. We are very grateful for each of you.

In the Church, we stress the significance of marriage, children, and the family because we know the doctrine. And we, as leaders of the Church, know that the adversary incessantly aims attacks at the family. In the past 50 years the birth rate has dropped in nearly every nation of the world. Marriages are being postponed until later in life, and families are getting smaller, even in the Church.

Our task to defend the family is not an easy one. Trends in the world diminish the significance of the family. Sadly, the sacred powers of procreation are desecrated by many people. And the divinely designed nature of marital intimacy is tarnished by the addictive, pernicious, and poisonous plague of pornography.

In reality, we are raising our children in enemy-occupied territory. The homes of our members must become the primary sanctuaries of our faith, where each can be safe from the sins of the world.

Our Master depends upon us to live according to His truth. Please teach our members that marriage is ordained of God. It is doctrinally based and eternally significant. The Lord has taught:

“From the beginning of the creation God made them male and female.

“For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife;

“And they twain shall be one flesh” (Mark 10:6–8).

Three times in sacred scripture the warning is made that “the whole earth would be utterly wasted” at the Lord’s return if certain conditions were not in place (see D&C 2:3; 138:48; Joseph Smith—History 1:39). In each instance, that warning relates to the condition of the human family without the sealing ordinances of the temple. Without these ordinances of exaltation, the purposes of creation would not be realized.

The work and glory of God—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man—comprise the foundation on which we stand as leaders in the Church. In 1995 the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles issued our historic statement “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” In addition, two of our previous worldwide leadership broadcasts pertained to the family: February 2006, *Supporting the Family*; and February 2008, *Building Up a Righteous Posterity*. Last year, we issued *Handbook 2: Administering the Church*. As you know, the first chapter of that handbook teaches of the sacred nature of the family. Please use these excellent resources as you teach and counsel our members.

Teach that family relationships start with the love of a husband for his wife, and of a wife for her husband. Marriage brings two very different and imperfect people together. Husbands and wives deal with their imperfections best with patience and a sense of humor. Each should stand ready to say, “I’m sorry! Please forgive me.” And each should be a peacemaker.

Each personal imperfection is an opportunity to change—to repent. Repentance, at any age, provides needed progress. It leads to a mighty change of heart, which leads to a love of God and your neighbor, especially that neighbor to whom you are married. Repentance includes forgiveness, and forgiveness is a commandment. The Lord said, “I ... will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men” (D&C 64:10). When repentance is complete, you even forgive yourself.

Differences of opinion occur between husband and wife. But one’s objective in marriage is never to win an argument, but to build an eternal relationship of love.

Marriage is sanctified by family prayer morning and night and daily scripture study. Marriage is stabilized by careful financial planning, avoiding debt, and living within a budget with willing obedience to the Lord’s law of tithing. Marriage is energized by making prime time together. Marriage is protected by an absolute commitment to make it successful.

Remind each married bearer of the priesthood that his highest duty is to care for his wife. She enables him to qualify for his greatest blessings. And when the children leave the nest, a husband and his wife will have each other in what can be a wonderful and exciting phase of life together.

Teach that parenting is a joint venture. The father exercises his leadership with light and love, never in any degree of unrighteousness. The mother provides the intuition, the inspiration, and the nurture that come from her so naturally.

Together they obey the Lord’s commandment to teach the gospel to their children. Jesus wants children to come unto Him, “for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:14). Parents are responsible for that teaching, with assistance from the Church. Helpful instruction on the relative roles of family and Church is found in *Handbook 2*, section 1.4.

Brothers and sisters, I am very grateful for the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. It provides light to guide us in this world darkened by immorality, iniquity, and infidelity. It teaches us to love all of God’s children, some of whom struggle with gender issues or other conditions that may not be fully understood. We need to help and encourage them and their family members without, of course, condoning sinful behavior.

Jesus knew the will of His Eternal Father, who declared, “This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). The Atonement of Jesus Christ enabled both of His objectives to be realized. Thanks to the Atonement, immortality became a reality for all who would ever live. Thanks to the Atonement, eternal life—life with our Heavenly Father—became possible for all who would qualify. To qualify, one develops faith, repents, is baptized, receives the Holy Ghost, and endures to the end. That end includes the endowment of the temple and its sealing ordinances. The Lord so taught His prophet:

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

“And if he does not, he cannot obtain it” (D&C 131:1–3).

God’s plan of happiness is perfect. As we teach it in our homes, quorums, councils, and classes, we bless all with love, hope, peace, and joy, here and hereafter. I so declare, along with my declaration of love and appreciation for you.

Now we will have the privilege of being taught by President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. We will be blessed by his instruction.

God lives. Jesus is the Christ. This is His Church, led today by President Thomas S. Monson. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Priesthood Power in the Home

President Boyd K. Packer

President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

It is good to be here and have you participate in this message that will go across the world. I have prayed very fervently for the power of the Spirit to be with me.

When the Doctrine and Covenants was assembled, the revelations were pulled together by the Prophet Joseph Smith, who was then still in his 20s. A revelation was given as an introduction. It is now section one of the Doctrine and Covenants, although it was given much later than most of the revelations there. There is one phrase in that revelation that changed the work of the Church, and if they will, changed the work of the Christian churches forever. That was simply “that every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world” (D&C 1:20).

To imagine putting together a church where the authority of the priesthood was to be given to every worthy adult male would seem like a very reckless, dangerous thing, but that is the way it is. So as we look at you across the world, you members of the Church, we are never afraid of the progress of the Church, because we know that there will come by conversion and baptism a little group of brethren upon whom the fulness of the priesthood can be conferred.

Any elder holds as much priesthood as does the President of the Church or as I do as an Apostle—different offices. But the priesthood is not delegated out and parceled a little here and a little there. It is given all at once. In the ordinance where ordinations take place, the priesthood is conferred, and then the office is conferred. So a young man as young as 18 planning to go on a mission has this ordinance, and they first say, “We confer upon you the Melchizedek Priesthood” and

then ordain you to the office of elder in that priesthood.

That priesthood has some other titles: “The priesthood ... after the holiest order of God” (D&C 84:18) and “the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God” (D&C 107:3). It is the consummate power on this earth. It is the power by which the earth was created—and all other things in the vast universe that are a part of our life.

We know that every father can, or should be, an officer in the priesthood, meaning that he holds the priesthood and presides over his family in righteousness.

We are sometimes charged with being unkind to the sisters in that they do not hold the priesthood and therefore do not hold the offices that the brethren do. But it is well understood that whether or not we are exalted depends upon the sister who is at our side—the wife, the mother of our children—and no holder of the priesthood would in any way depreciate or mitigate the value and power of his wife. When I hear those comments that the sisters are less than the brethren, I wish that they could see inside the heart of every worthy holder of the priesthood and understand how he feels about his wife, the mother of his children—a reverence, not quite worship but a kind of worship, a respect for the companion in life that causes it to be that he can be exalted ultimately.

The Church is very practical in its organization. We are not confined to having one prelate or priest or pastor or vicar given authority then to rule over the congregation, but as that simple expression in the Doctrine and Covenants says, “Every man

might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world" (D&C 1:20). We are very careful to set standards of worthiness so that when a man is prepared for the priesthood he must give up a lot of things that other men enjoy in life, and every one of them is a protection for him and his family. The Word of Wisdom was given at a time when the dangers of tea and coffee, liquor and tobacco, and all those things were not known. And yet the early brethren, bowing to what the Prophet said, would obediently accept the fact that there are standards if you are going to be ordained into the priesthood. And that is a great thing for a father, a husband, to live the gospel and teach it by example.

There is the responsibility in the Church that is permanent. We call a man to be a stake president or a bishop or some other presiding officer, and we pay proper respect for that authority, and yet the tenure of it is temporary. One day a stake president will be released, or a bishop will be released, but an elder is not released, and a high priest is not released, and a Seventy is not released. They hold that authority, and the honor of presiding over a family and being a father is eternal.

That gives me a lot of comfort at my young age when we have been married for 65 years, and I think that could come to an end. Then I realize that the gospel is true, and it will never come to an end. I have been very careful, and am very careful, to treat my wife with that respect and reverence that is due her in performing that thing that is of most worth for a woman in this life to live the gospel, to be the wife and the mother of the children of a worthy holder of the priesthood.

In putting the Church together, the priesthood was restored, the Aaronic Priesthood first and then the Melchizedek Priesthood. The Church was not given all at once as a blueprint that the Prophet could just look at and then announce. It came "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little" (2 Nephi 28:30; see also D&C 128:21). But as it came together in the fulness of time, we finally had it all restored.

The Church is growing very rapidly, and we see you in our mind's eye in the congregations across the world listening to this program. It is through the blessing of translation that we can speak your language. That is the only way I can speak perfect language to the people of the world. I have had hard enough trouble with English! And yet we know that the words are translated into equal words in the other languages, but more than that, they are accompanied by the power and the Spirit and the intent.

We perform the ordinances "in the name of Jesus Christ." There are one or two that vary from that a little. One of them, interestingly enough, is baptism, where the prayer says, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (3 Nephi 11:25; D&C 20:73). There are some ordinances in the temple that are expressed the same way. So everything that can be given is given, and in due time, we come to know our Father in Heaven, a loving Father whose concern for us is such that He rejoices at our happiness and, I am sure, sheds tears for our disobedience and mistakes.

When we have children of our own and hold the priesthood and those two things are together in our life, then we know what the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ is about, and we know who He is: Christ, the Son of God, the Only Begotten of the Father, who wrought the Atonement through which we can have erased all of the mistakes we have made in life and stand clean and pure before the Father in that day of judgment.

It is an interesting thing that across the world "every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world" (D&C 1:20).

You out there speaking languages, one or two of you speak in many languages. I have known one or two of the General Authorities that just seem to inhale languages. With Jacob de Jager, I used to travel with him, and we went to China and to other places. It just seemed like he stepped off the plane and took a deep breath, and he could speak the language and speak it well.

We can that way have men better than we are in many ways leading the Church out there and adequate and complete because they are attached to the powers of heaven. They are looked after by the arm of the Almighty and know that Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten of the Father, is the head of the Church. We are His servants, all of us, and we are His sons, and we are His daughters.

It is a source of great comfort to me to know that as I go through life and make mistakes—I have said I wish that my last mistake was my worst one and my next mistake would not come. I do not have hope of either. You make mistakes and look back on your life and wonder, “Well, where am I now near the end of my life to face the judgment?” That does not worry me because I have repented and taken hold of that great Atonement that is offered by living the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As a holder of the priesthood, we respond to every call that comes to perform every service that will come, the most important of which is within the walls of our home. The last few Presidents of the Church, conscious of what the adversary was doing, have centered their teaching, their preaching on the home and the family. And we have done that in this meeting as well. The Church is made up of families. We talk about the organization and how many wards and stakes we have, and they are incidental and temporary.

When we talk about how many families we have, then we see the real growth in the Church.

I want to conclude with a witness and a testimony. I have lived a long time. I have traveled widely—2½ million miles in the countries across the world. Many of them I have visited dozens of times. I have learned that we are the children of God, and I have come to know that the gospel of Jesus Christ is true. When we come to you as leaders in the auxiliaries and in the priesthood and in the stakes, we come with a fervent testimony and knowledge, for we know that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Only Begotten of the Father, and all that we do, we do in His name as His agents. And what we do as His agents in governing the Church as an Apostle or in guiding a ward as a bishop or a counselor in an elders quorum presidency—all of these are secondary to being a father and a husband who holds the priesthood and lives worthily of it. That is the source of happiness and the great achievement in mortality.

I know that God lives. I know that Jesus is the Christ. I know the Lord. This is His Church, and His guiding hand is with it and is with every worthy holder of the priesthood and every wife and mother and even with little children, watched over by the benevolent hand of Him who is the Son of God. Of Him I bear witness, and of the Father I bear witness, and my witness is true, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Strengthening Quorums and Members

Elder M. Russell Ballard

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Elder Neil L. Andersen

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Elder Ronald A. Rasband

Of the Presidency of the Seventy

Elaine S. Dalton

Young Women General President

Rosemary M. Wixom

Primary General President

Elder Ballard: Thank you, Elder Oaks. We are grateful to participate in this leadership broadcast and appreciate the instructions we have received from members of the Quorum of the Twelve. As Elder Oaks said, our group will discuss some of the ways we can follow the leadership principles outlined in chapter 3 of *Handbook 2* and also in chapter 4, which deals with councils. The Lord gave us a pattern in the Doctrine and Covenants. Let me just read it:

“And now, behold, I give unto you a commandment, that when ye are assembled together ye shall instruct and edify each other, that ye may know how to act and direct my church, how to act upon the points of my law and commandments, which I have given” (D&C 43:8).

Our assignment is to discuss how to implement the instructions we have received in this meeting. Specifically, how do we minister to families, how do we strengthen Melchizedek Priesthood holders, and how do we help the youth reactivate and strengthen each other?

We know that Church members are facing real challenges in these difficult days. And Church growth occurs when personal lifelong conversion to the gospel results in increased faithfulness of each individual and family. This is a constant effort and it is a blessing that comes when we are able to save and help one another, particularly one by one.

We had a wonderful example that you talked about, Sister Wixom, about how some Primary leaders visited a family that needed some real help. Would you share that with us?

Sister Wixom: Yes, Elder Ballard, and it’s happening—it’s happening all over the world when Primary presidencies take the opportunity to go into the homes of the children and visit with the families. Let’s look at how it happened in Guatemala.

Video Segment 1: Ministering to Children

Narrator: Ministering to families begins with loving and caring about every family member and seeking to understand their needs.

Female: Stephanie, what’s the situation with the Vasquez children?

Female: The children really want to come to Primary, but they don’t because of their parents.

Narrator: These leaders understood that children and youth can have a powerful influence on their families. They sought the guidance of the Spirit, counseled together, and decided to visit the Vasquez family that week.

The leaders recognized that on the occasions when the children were able to come to church, they had spiritual experiences.

Female: Cindy, your mom told me that you get up early to go to church. Why do you like to go to church?

Female: Because I like to learn more of the word of God and spend time with the other children.

Female: And you, Danilo?

Male: I like to read the scriptures, and sometimes they have me go up to pray. I pray for my family and for everyone.

Female: Sister Vasquez, how do you feel, knowing that your children are attending church?

Female: I feel happy when they get out of bed and say, "Mommy, let's go to church!" I wish I could go with them, but my husband needs me because he is sick.

Female: If you make the effort and pray for him, he will be able to go to church. Our Father will bless you and give you both the strength that you need.

Narrator: Working with the bishopric, these ward leaders planned ways to continue blessing the children and strengthening their family. An inspired Primary activity helped the children feel the love and friendship of other ward members.

Female: Today the children are interacting with the other children, which is what we wanted, so they could make friends within the Church.

Narrator: As the Spirit touched the children's hearts, they looked to their parents for guidance, and their parents were strengthened to come back to church.

From the handbook we learn, "The family is ordained of God. It is the most important unit in time and in eternity."

Elder Ballard: That's a wonderful example, Sister Wixom. Now let's talk about what did we learn from just that little example?

Sister Wixom: Did you feel the Spirit in that home? Just like Elder Nelson taught us earlier today, it was a sanctuary of faith. Those hearts of those family members, they knew the gospel was true.

They just needed that visit from a Primary presidency to connect the children to the parents and strengthen that family.

Elder Ballard: And also the power of those little children and the children intermingling within the Primary organization. And so even little children can be part of this great cause of being the one that might be able to help bring another one to activity in the Church.

Anything particularly, Elder Rasband, that stands out to you that you'd like to comment on?

Elder Rasband: I was moved with the spirit of the children. In my viewing of that little segment, it was the children that helped bring their parents back, that helped bring them to church by their loving to go to Primary activities and their loving to go to church on Sunday, even though the mother and the father couldn't go. And I think this is a great example of how the children can help bring along their parents.

Elder Ballard: The example that we had on the video, Sister Wixom, those children were learning. What were they learning? I mean, their responses, I thought, were terrific.

Sister Wixom: I picked up on that too. They had participated in Primary enough to know and feel a testimony of the Book of Mormon and the power of prayer. And they took that home to their families.

Sister Dalton: You know, it's all about conversion, and they said they like to read in the Book of Mormon and pray. And when you're converted, the natural result of that is that you do strengthen your brethren.

Elder Ballard: And so, Sister Dalton, how does this relate to all those that are watching this broadcast around the world?

Sister Dalton: Well, you know, I keep thinking, Elder Rasband, of the scripture "a little child shall lead them" (Isaiah 11:6), and sometimes that's the case. But these are ordinary things that bring extraordinary results that leaders are doing all over the world.

There are some Young Women leaders I know of in Brazil who planned a Young Women in Excellence specifically with a mother who was not a member of the Church in mind. And as the daughter testified in that meeting, the mother's heart was touched. And that relationship between the mother and the daughter was strengthened.

Elder Ballard: Sure.

Sister Dalton: And as that happens, then families are strengthened, and so it's happening everywhere.

Elder Ballard: Elder Andersen.

Elder Andersen: I just wanted to add that sometimes we as leaders, in our anxiousness to help the children, we try to go around the parents. And in this case, they did not. And you think of that beautiful phrase that has been used in the Church for 50 years. It's in the handbook, where it says the home is the basis of a righteous life and no other instrumentality can take its place or fulfill its essential functions. And these wise Primary leaders understood that to just grab the children was not the answer. They had to go into the family because that's going to be the lasting place of righteousness and goodness.

Sister Dalton: And these Young Women leaders knew that too; if they can strengthen that bond, that eternal bond between a mother and a daughter, the families will be strengthened.

Elder Ballard: One thing we also witnessed there, which was very important, it came into a council setting within the ward; they came back and they talked about their situation, and just think, the power that we have when a Primary presidency will talk specifically about a family. They decided that they wanted to go out and try to touch the life of the Vasquez family. Just think what can happen with elders quorums, with high priests groups, or anybody that's less active or anybody that's struggling. When we get together and we talk about someone's need, what we can do.

Elder Rasband, I think you had an experience that you'd like to share with us on the Melchizedek Priesthood.

Elder Rasband: Well, thank you, Elder Ballard. I'm excited for this next segment because of what we've heard today. When you think of the direction we've received and the counsel; particularly I liked Elder Perry and Elder Christofferson talking about the importance of the priesthood and the quorum. And then, of course, President Packer, whose lifelong familiar themes of home and family and power in the priesthood are all wrapped into this story that we're going to see from the British Isles. Let's see it now.

Video Segment 2: Activation

Ben: Brother Grant has been inactive for as long as I can remember, for about 20 years.

Keith: I went inactive for all the wrong reasons and was inactive for quite a long time.

Ben: I started working with and visiting Keith and his family to help them come back. At that time, Keith was a priest, so we started working towards receiving the Melchizedek Priesthood. Once he received it, he was called as second counselor in the elders quorum presidency. I was able to really work with him and encourage him.

Ben: Is there anything that John and I can do for you?

Tracy: I'd like you to give me a blessing.

Ben: We state her full name, by the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood, and we seal the anointing that's taken place. Then you give her a blessing as dictated by the Spirit.

Keith: Being able to give a blessing is a privilege to act in the name of Jesus Christ, to be able to do His work.

Ben: Once he received the Melchizedek Priesthood, we set the goal to receive his own endowment and be sealed. He attended the temple preparation classes. Once he held a temple recommend, we went and did baptisms.

Keith: He helped me to prepare; he called the temple and made the appointments for us.

Ben: So I was able to help him prepare and give support and guidance as he went through the endowment, and then I witnessed him and his wife be sealed as a family.

Keith: It's so serene and peaceful. It's not like being anywhere on earth. It's like halfway between here and heaven, I'd imagine.

Our family's gotten a lot closer since we started back at church. There's no way I'm ever going to stop going to church again. While ever I'm breathing I'm going to be there.

Ben: I felt proud, but not in a boastful way. I felt proud that Heavenly Father had been pleased with the work I'd done in working with them and encouraging them and supporting them.

Elder Ballard: Well, what do we learn from that experience with that elders quorum presidency?

Elder Rasband: Well, first of all, Elder Ballard, this is a real story. This is Ben Blackburn, who is the elders quorum president, reaching out and ministering to a quorum member, who, together with others in their quorum in the ward, brought a family to the temple and to their ordinances and covenants. How powerful is that?

Elder Ballard: And we have to ask ourselves, I think, when we see an example like that, how many more of our Father's children, both men and women and even children, are out there that just that kind of attention given to them could end up with that kind of a result.

Elder Andersen: You know, President Monson, I've heard him teach us many, many times that one of the greatest feelings in life is knowing that the Lord has sent you to answer another person's prayer. And you know how many people in the world we live in today are praying for solutions, praying for hope, and they might not even know that they're seeking the Church or to return. But you see in this elders quorum president a desire to reach out and help a family. And that is a role that President Monson has taught us over and over again.

Elder Ballard: And was emphasized by the Brethren in the earlier part of the program. They laid out some very good suggestions as to how we can get these kinds of results in the lives of more of our Heavenly Father's children.

Sister Wixom.

Sister Wixom: My favorite part of this segment is when that home teacher taught her husband how to give her a blessing. Those two home teachers could have given her that blessing, but a wife loves nothing more than to have her husband's hands on her own head. And he walked him through that and provided that opportunity.

Elder Ballard: Thank you. Elder Rasband, you know, President Packer often teaches the experience of the elder. Would you share that with all the people around the world, where he was asked to give the blessing but chose not to—explain that to them.

Elder Rasband: Well, it's much like what we have just seen where President Packer was working with a formerly less-active father and a blessing was requested. They invited President Packer to do it and he, himself, turned to the father and said, "You know how to do this, and what you don't know, I'll help you." And President Packer helped him know, just how we saw this elders quorum president describe to that brother, "Here's how you do the blessing." And he did, and President Packer has always said, "I'm surely grateful I didn't get in the way of that blessing by a worthy father-husband."

Elder Ballard: That's a great example. And what happens, Elder Andersen, to that inactive, or maybe that father or Melchizedek Priesthood leader giving the first blessing maybe after a long time, or maybe even the first one that he ever has given?

Elder Andersen: I had that experience where I helped a man who had been a member for 10 years, had never given a blessing. And the next verses of President Packer where he quotes that every man might speak in the name of God, right after that, it says, "That faith ... might increase in the earth" (D&C 1:21), and what happens is there

is an abundance of faith that enters into the heart of the person giving the blessing.

Elder Ballard: And so all of us that are in this meeting around the world, could we think about who are those wonderful men that have not given a blessing for a long time, that we might be able to reach out to and teach using the principles that we learned earlier from the members of the Twelve in the earlier part of this program?

Elder Andersen: Could I add one other item that I think was very important here that Elder Perry emphasized? He said, if at all possible, we need to elevate the role of the elders quorum president, the high priests group leader, so that the bishop and the bishopric can take care of their duties that they need to take care of. And I think that he said, if at all possible, they should be kept in their callings longer than a few months or even a year or two. The elders quorum president and high priests group leader should be elevated in their role in the ward.

Elder Ballard: What is the main purpose of the Church, Sister Dalton? What is this work we're trying to do?

Sister Dalton: It's to bring families, to seal families so that they can be eternal in our Heavenly Father's kingdom.

Elder Ballard: Absolutely. And we could use His words, "This is my work."

Sister Dalton: "And my glory."

Elder Ballard: What? "To bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). And so in a lot of the efforts we do in the Church, we've got to also always keep in mind that we're trying to help each other make that wonderful goal of being able to go back to Heavenly Father when life is over.

Elder Ballard: Elder Andersen and Elder Rasband, talk a little bit about that effort to get that good brother to the temple, why that's important. What are your viewpoints, both of you?

Elder Andersen: Well, Elder Perry and Elder Christofferson talked about how all of this leads us to the temple. And that good elders quorum president in England, he wasn't just trying to bring the man back to church. He was aiming at covenants and bringing him to Christ through the ordinances of the temple. And wasn't that beautiful to see those pictures outside of the temple? The elders quorum president beaming like a proud father as these people he had worked with, evidently, for quite a number of times because, he said, he took him first to do baptisms for the dead. He was thinking beyond just bringing him to church. He was helping connect him to his Heavenly Father.

Sister Dalton: I love that thought because that really is the case, that we have to keep our eye on the temple with all this work that we're doing when we're trying to minister.

Elder Rasband: I thought, when looking at that video, about 3 Nephi 18:32, and think of an elders quorum president and the family and the role the Lord played in this as well:

"Nevertheless, ye shall not cast him out of your synagogues, or your places of worship, for 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, and I shall heal them; and ye shall be the means of bringing salvation unto them."

The Lord's role in healing them, and every elders quorum president and member being the means of bringing them through that process.

Elder Andersen: That elders quorum president was turning that good man to God and to prayer and letting him develop level by level, step by step.

Elder Rasband: He sure got a calling quickly.

Elder Andersen: Yes, he did.

Elder Rasband: He comes back into activity and he's called to be a counselor in the quorum presidency.

Elder Ballard: Well, that's all part of the program. I mean, that's a good idea to move him along, to give him something to do.

Elder Andersen: Right.

Elder Ballard: Anything else that we missed?

Sister Wixom: I'd just want to comment on when you read 3 Nephi 18 and you said, it says, "Nevertheless, continue to minister." Did you notice that twice in just those verses, it says that same phrase, "Nevertheless, continue to minister" (see 3 Nephi 18:30, 32). I think that's the Lord's way of saying, "Never give up." And when there is rejection, continue to love and to minister. Nevertheless.

Elder Ballard: Well, that was a great example. Thank you, Elder Rasband, for sharing that. Let's shift now and talk about the future of the Church, which are the young men and the young women and the youth of the Church. We got wonderful instruction on service and how powerful service is affecting the individual who serves and also the person that's receiving the service.

Elder Andersen, you have an experience that you'd like to share with us that demonstrates that in a most remarkable way.

Elder Andersen: Well, both Elder Perry and Elder Christofferson spoke about the sanctifying power of service and that the Savior taught this so importantly, that he who is the greatest is the servant, not the master. And so this illustration is of a young deacons quorum president named Spencer in the state of Arizona in the United States who helped a young man named Dayton, who is in his quorum. This one is very dramatic and might not be as illustrative as what all deacons quorum presidents would do, but it will set the tone for what we want to learn. Let's watch.

Video Segment 3: Dayton's Legs

Spencer: When I got called to be the deacons quorum president, I felt a great sense of responsibility on my shoulders that I should be watching out for everybody in the quorum. I met

Dayton in our deacons quorum at church. Dayton has cerebral palsy, and he can't talk or communicate that well, but you can feel his spirit. He should have the opportunity to do what everybody else does.

Dayton's father: We've always tried to include him in everything that we do. Along the way we found out that he just loves the wind in his face.

Spencer's father: Spencer knelt down right in front of Dayton and grabbed him on his knees, and he said, "Dayton, would you like to do a triathlon with me?"

Dayton doesn't communicate other than he'll blink for yes and he won't blink for no. And he started blinking, and he said, "Dad, he said yes!"

Spencer: It was a different experience than the other triathlons I've done because when I got on that bike it felt harder pulling someone else with me the entire way. I knew that Dayton was within 5 feet of me the whole time, and it was awesome to know that there was someone else there—one of my really good friends that could be with me.

Spencer's father: I've learned great lessons of love in a boy that does what Christ would do if He were here in fulfilling his responsibility as a deacons quorum president, as a friend.

Spencer: Near the finish line was very spiritual for Dayton and I because he shows me that you can do hard things no matter what your challenges are or what the circumstances are. I felt that I was out of juice. I was out of energy, but then I don't even know where it came from; Dayton started smiling, and I started to speed up and I had the energy to sprint the last few hundred yards into the finish line, and I just felt great at the finish line. I didn't feel that I was drained of my energy; I felt that the Spirit was there helping Dayton and I to finish that race.

Spencer's mother: He doesn't want to look like the hero at all. He wants Dayton to look like the hero and he's just Dayton's legs.

Spencer: I feel blessed to be able to hold the priesthood. I feel that Heavenly Father and my

bishop—they have a lot of trust in me that I can do service for others and can act on what I think needs to be done.

Elder Ballard: I've seen that two or three times, and every time I do, I have to fight away the tears, but what have we learned? Let's talk about that. What are the principles that any deacons quorum president could do? He doesn't need to be quite like Spencer, but let's talk about how these Aaronic Priesthood quorum leaders can touch the lives of their quorum members.

Elder Andersen: Well, Elder Ballard, we first heard Spencer say, "As I was made a deacons quorum president, I felt a great responsibility to look out after the other members of my quorum." And this is something that we will see more and more in the years ahead, that young quorum presidents and young women take more responsibility for those their same age. Listen to this counsel in the Doctrine and Covenants to a deacons quorum president. It said:

"And again, verily I say unto you, the duty of a president over the office of a deacon is to preside ... [and] to sit in council with them, and to teach them their duty, edifying one another, as it is given according to the covenants" (D&C 107:85).

Now, that's a large responsibility, but that is their responsibility.

Elder Ballard: Sister Dalton? How does that play as it relates to young women?

Sister Dalton: You know, it, it makes me emotional because we see young women doing the same things, the Personal Progress for young women who can't do it themselves. And I'm reminded, as you were, Elder Andersen, of a scripture in the Doctrine and Covenants that says, it's in 84:106:

"And if any man among you be strong in the Spirit, let him take with him him that is weak, that he may be edified in all meekness, that he may become strong also."

And these young people in our Church are incredible, and they can do for others what others

can't do for themselves—and they want to. And they're amazing.

Elder Ballard: Thank you very much. Elder Rasband, where are the future elders quorum presidents and high councilors and bishoprics and stake presidencies? Where are they today?

Elder Rasband: Well, they're residing in all the deacons, teachers, and priests quorums throughout the whole Church. And they are all joined by wonderful young women, in Beehives and in every organization of the Young Women. And this is the power of the future of the Church. Little Spencer here, this deacons quorum president, he inspires me. It's just so from his heart and so genuine.

Sister Dalton: I wish every deacon in the Church could see that segment.

Elder Ballard: I don't know why they can't. It'll be on the Internet.

Elder Andersen: That's right. It'll be in our Leadership Training Resources. And certainly, any deacons quorum president, with the help of his bishop, could see this video.

Sister Wixom: Some of those future leaders are in Primary. And when Spencer said, "I found out I could do a hard thing," I thought, that's exactly what our youth today need to know and feel inside, in their bones, that they can do a hard thing and stand alone, if necessary, like President Monson said at conference.

Elder Ballard: And I would think that everyone that listened to Elder Nelson talk about the importance of marriage would see this little demonstration or get their own example out of their own ward or branch. How precious are children. How precious is marriage. How precious is it to have a little boy like Dayton and a deacons quorum president like Spencer that are on the same journey. But they have a father and a mother, and without marriage, these spirit children of our Heavenly Father can't get into homes like this.

Sister Dalton: Did you see how touched the father and the mother were, that someone would care enough? And that strengthens your faith when you see a young boy ministering as the Savior would minister. It strengthens my faith.

Elder Andersen: Elder Perry and I, just a couple of weeks ago, were at a local ward and he was going to teach some of the principles of the Melchizedek Priesthood. But we had all the priesthood there and about the time I started to speak, two of the young men suddenly left the room. And I thought, "Well, I don't know how I feel about that." And then, in about 15 minutes—you know, the ward was a Utah ward with homes close to the chapel—here they came back with another boy on their arms. And after the meeting, we could see what they'd done. They wanted to bring him forward. He was not there, and they had gone out after him. And in the spirit of President Monson's teachings, they had been to the rescue right that morning.

Elder Ballard: If President Monson were here, he would say, "And reach out to the widow and reach out to the one that is lonely and is missing the blessings of the Church." I think this is a great opportunity that we've had to be able to be instructed together that we might learn how to act and how to bring about the fulfillment of the covenants that await our Heavenly Father's children as they practice some of these principles that have been taught here.

Let's just go around the circle and wrap up our part of this little discussion. Elder Andersen and Sister Dalton, anything that you'd care to close with?

Elder Andersen: Well, I think what has come to my mind is the sanctity of marriage, the power of families. I remember President Packer said, "We are an organization of families, not an organization just of wards and branches." And we must bring those families to Christ where a priesthood bearer, if possible, acts in the name of the Lord to help the whole family come unto Christ. And I just want to testify to you and to those who are listening that I know that this power of Christ, as we seek to bring others to

Christ, He will bless us to know who to reach out to and who to help.

Elder Ballard: Sister Dalton?

Sister Dalton: You know, I think the thing that resonates with me is that this is the Lord's work and it's done one on one. It's done one by one, and we have such a great example in our prophet. He leads the way and he does minister one on one. And so I don't think that leaders should be overwhelmed. There are so many who need help, but what I felt and saw today was that we zeroed in. These leaders zeroed in on one person that they could help. And if everyone could just do that, everything would change. Families would be different; individuals would be different. I want to be like our prophet because he's like the Savior.

Elder Ballard: Thank you very much. Sister Wixom?

Sister Wixom: Thank you, Elder Ballard. In Alma chapter 24, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies are talking about what helped them change their attitude from wickedness to righteousness, to come back to the fold, and their leader said, "I thank my great God that he has given us a portion of his Spirit to soften our hearts, that we have opened a correspondence with these brethren, the Nephites" (Alma 24:8). That opening of the correspondence with those in their ward or in their branch made all the difference in the world. And those Lamanites' hearts were softened—and they returned.

Elder Ballard: Correspondence meaning communication.

Sister Wixom: Yes, ministering and having conversation, going into their homes, understanding their needs, and loving them as brothers and sisters, as sons and daughters of Heavenly Father.

Elder Ballard: Thank you very much. Elder Rasband?

Elder Rasband: Among all that's been said, I enjoyed the spirit of counsel that I saw demonstrated in every one of these little video

segments—Primary presidencies counseling with bishoprics, quorum presidencies counseling about how they’re going to go minister to their members, even a deacons quorum presidency, I’m sure, talked about Dayton. And this is a wonderful help to the fathers and mothers, the councils that we are able to be involved with in the Lord’s Church.

Elder Ballard: Thank you. Well, brothers and sisters, it’s been a pleasure and an honor for us to be able to participate. We hope that everyone who attends this leadership broadcast will really watch it carefully, watch it more than once, think about their own situation, their own circumstance, and determine what they can do more in their various assignments to be able to lift, inspire, and bless our Heavenly Father’s children.

We ask our Heavenly Father to bless you, watch over you, and bless you in your assignments and inspire you and give you promptings and

impressions as to what you can do in your own quiet way and in working together in your ward or your stake or your family council to bless more of our Heavenly Father’s children.

Just think what would happen if every elders quorum was able to bring just one or two a year. I’m talking about each presidency working together to get that done. It’s not that hard when we bring it down, looking at the effort of reaching out to our Heavenly Father’s children that He loves and whom we have the responsibility for because we have the fulness of the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ.

We thank our Heavenly Father for the Restoration of the gospel through the Prophet Joseph, and testify that this is the true Church of Jesus Christ here upon the earth and that our Heavenly Father and the Lord will bless us as we take action. May that be the case in every one of your lives is our humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Acting on the Truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf

Second Counselor in the First Presidency

My dear brothers and sisters, thank you for being with us today. President Monson has asked that I speak to you. He sends his love and blessings to all of you.

We know you have set aside other things to attend this worldwide training session, and we commend you for your faithfulness. We love you for your willingness to consecrate your time, talents, and resources to building the kingdom of God.

We have received wise counsel today from those who have devoted their lives to hearing and heeding the voice of the Holy Spirit. We urge you to carefully consider their counsel.

Of course, we know that hearing words of counsel and acting upon them are two very different things. The Savior spoke of the difference when He said that those who hear and obey are like those who build their houses upon a rock. And those who hear but don't follow—well, they could just end up being ex-home owners.

Church members are wonderful in their desire to be obedient and follow the Lord. But sometimes, in spite of our good intentions, we delay doing what we should do or we misunderstand what we were taught. As a result, inspired words of counsel might not have the promised effect.

I am reminded of a story about a woman who had a dream in which her husband gave her a beautiful necklace she had always wanted. When she asked her husband what he thought the dream meant, he smiled as only a loving husband can and said, "You'll find out tonight!"

That evening the husband came home and handed his wife a beautifully wrapped present. She opened it with deep appreciation for her sensitive husband, only to find a book entitled *A Guide to Understanding Dreams*.

President Harold B. Lee has said to the teachers of the Church that it is not only important to be understood but also not to be misunderstood.¹

So the first thing we must do is understand. The second is to put our understanding into action. This is the "Put Your Shoulders to the Wheel" part.

In that spirit, and building on what Elder Ballard's group discussed, I would like to offer some additional counsel and then a few suggestions as to how you might implement what you have heard today.

We human beings have a strange tendency to complicate simple things. We set up rules, laws, bylaws, processes, and subprocesses. Eventually, we pile up load after load until we end up under a huge weight of expectations that are so complicated it is difficult to keep track of them, let alone meet them.

This is one of the reasons Paul said, "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Corinthians 3:6).

Too often, we complicate the beauty and simplicity of the gospel of Jesus Christ with endless lists of meticulous expectations. However, when we focus on the "why" of the gospel, much of the confusion fades away. Why are we here?

Why are we asked to obey the commandments?
Why is the Atonement of Jesus Christ of such value to us?

The proper “why” questions will lead us to the proper “who,” “what,” “when,” “where,” and “how” decisions.

Elder Ballard and his group gave us a great example by asking, “Why do we meet in councils? Is it to arrange and rearrange the ward calendar? to discuss staffing problems? to schedule cleaning the building?”

Such issues may be urgent and necessary, but are they the most important? There are many ways to enhance our precious council time, like always coming well prepared. We could handle scheduling or other organizational matters by memo, phone, e-mail, or text. When we allow organizational matters to dominate our efforts and time in our councils, we run the risk of missing the mark of why the Lord has called us to minister in His Church.

We meet in councils to seek the inspiration of the Spirit in building the kingdom of God. We meet to seek the answers to two basic questions:

1. How can we help our members better love the Lord our God with all their heart, soul, and mind?
2. How can we help our members better love their neighbors as themselves?

Every other thing we discuss in our councils within our Church organizations should derive from these great commandments, for everything else hangs upon them.

Once we understand the “why” behind our council meetings, it is easier for us to focus appropriately on *how* to accomplish it. For example, as we consider ways to increase love for neighbor among our members, we might decide to plan a service activity in which we include our less-active members and our friends of other faiths.

All of our discussions concerning young and old, from welfare needs to missionary work, from gospel teaching to strengthening families, should be framed in this context.

By simplifying and strengthening the council process and by inviting the Spirit, we will find the life and fire of the Holy Spirit, who provides guidance and heavenly support for our efforts.

Some may be tempted to say, “Just tell us what to do, and we’ll do it.” While we commend a righteous desire to be obedient, there is more to leadership in the Church (and more to life) than simply checking items off an assigned to-do list.

As you have noticed, the new handbooks do not specify in great detail every action you are to take in your calling. These handbooks were provided for the right amount of structure without regimenting every detail. It might be wise to look at the handbooks and even the scriptures not as checklists or detailed scripts but rather as opportunities to prepare our minds and hearts to receive divine inspiration for our responsibilities.

Unfortunately, we sometimes don’t seek revelation or answers from the scriptures or the handbooks because we think we know the answers already.

Brothers and sisters, as good as our previous experience may be, if we stop asking questions, stop thinking, stop pondering, we can thwart the revelations of the Spirit. Remember, it was the questions young Joseph asked that opened the door for the restoration of all things. We can block the growth and knowledge our Heavenly Father intends for us. How often has the Holy Spirit tried to tell us something we needed to know but couldn’t get past the massive iron gate of what we thought we already knew?

Another topic I would like to discuss is the difference between growth and real growth. We have heard some about this today. In Church terms, growth could be defined as new members. New members come through children baptized at age eight as well as convert baptisms. Real growth, however, is defined as growth in the number of active members.

In some areas of the Church we have dramatic growth in new members, yet active membership remains stagnant or grows only a little. We have some measurable ways to indicate activity in the Church, such as sacrament meeting attendance, ordination to the priesthood at the right age, missionary service, and possession of a current temple recommend. Perhaps the more accurate indicators of real growth in the gospel of Jesus Christ are those that we can't measure as easily, such as daily prayer, scripture study, family home evening, love at home and for our neighbor, and personal experiences with Christ's Atonement. These are recorded not by a clerk in Church records but in our hearts and in heaven.

Our missionary efforts are compromised if we baptize God's children but do not maintain love and friendship with these precious new members who are excited to find fellowship with the Saints and a place of belonging in the household of God.

Here again, our councils can deliberate on the spiritual and temporal welfare of every member—taking special care to consider each new convert. Our work as a council is to help our members grow in their love for Heavenly Father and their fellowman. If we focus our efforts here, one-on-one, many more members will feel that they have found a home in the Church—that they have found the “why” of the gospel.

Brothers and sisters, let us remember that you and I are not perfect. Consequently, our councils will not be perfect either. At times they will be understaffed. At times they may include one or perhaps several people who are not fully engaged in the work or who are distracted by the complications and stresses of everyday life.

Please do not give up. Be careful not to over-idealize your expectations of how your councils should operate. Once again, if you are focused on the “why” of the gospel, the Spirit will direct your humble efforts.

President Hinckley once said, “We are here to assist our [Heavenly] Father in His work and His glory, ‘to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man’ (Moses 1:39). Your obligation is as

serious in your sphere of responsibility as is my obligation in my sphere.”² What a humbling statement by a prophet of God.

If your circumstances are less than ideal, please take comfort in knowing that the Lord will support and enhance your efforts, sanctify your decisions and actions, perfect them through the tender mercies of Christ, and “consecrate [your] performance . . . , that [it] may be for the welfare of [your] soul” (2 Nephi 32:9) and the souls of those you serve.

As I mentioned earlier, there is little good in hearing the word of God if we do not translate what we hear into our lives. Consequently, we ask that you take the following steps without hesitation and continue to do so throughout your service in your callings.

First, individually and as councils, prayerfully consider the instruction you have received. Think of priesthood power in the home, honoring divine covenants, rescuing others, focusing on the one, strengthening our youth, and building eternal marriages and families by applying gospel principles in our daily lives.

As you consider these topics, ask yourself about the “why” of your service and ministry and the resulting “therefore what” in your responsibilities as individuals and as councils. In this process, please open your hearts and minds to the will of heaven, and I promise that the Spirit will reveal the things that matter most—for you, your family, and your responsibilities in the Church.

Second, as a result of pondering and discussion, determine a few specific actions you will commit to implement. Please keep in mind that the actions of each organization, ward, stake, family, and individual may be different. They should fit your circumstances and needs. The unity we seek is not necessarily that we all do exactly the same things at the same time but that we each listen to and always follow the direction of the same Holy Spirit.

Third, once you have made these commitments, follow up on them within the scope of your responsibilities and callings at each of your

council meetings. Please do this. We ask you also to bring your decisions and efforts before the Lord in your daily prayers and ask for further light and direction. Trust Him. He knows you, and He loves you.

My dear brothers and sisters, we love and admire you; we pray for you. We know that you desire to heed the whisperings of the Spirit, to follow the Savior, and to be His hands in this great work. I bear witness that this work is true, that you are

called of God. The Savior is at the head of this Church with President Monson as His prophet.

Dear friends, may you always find joy in your righteous service is my blessing and my prayer, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Harold B. Lee, in *Teaching, No Greater Call* (1999), 52.
2. Gordon B. Hinckley, "This Is the Work of the Master," *Ensign*, May 1995, 71.