

sinner sometimes blames someone else, rejects the gospel, and flees. A plant growing in rocky soil withers quickly. Serious transgression, then, is the second danger to our testimonies. The road back includes removing the rocks, turning over and enriching the soil, overcoming the sin, and resisting further temptations. Increasing numbers are returning to the Church by repenting of their sins. They seldom completely lose their testimonies.

3. *Substitution.* The final danger I shall call substitution. Some fine and capable people become so committed to science, philosophy, history, art, music, athletics, professional pursuits, intellectual hobbies, or recreation that these interests replace the simple core values, covenants, and doctrines of the gospel. These pursuits become a substitute religion and the governing force in their lives.

The central gospel principles repeated over and over in the covenants and ordinances of the temple, embodied in the sacrament, and found in the scriptures are available to all of us if we do not imagine somehow that we have outgrown the gospel of Christ. We also have our latter-day gnostics who "know" more than the garden-variety disciples of Christ.

I do not mean, however, to suggest that we should not continue to learn and deepen our knowledge about life and about the gospel. A solid, mature, and growing knowledge of the gospel is desirable and should be a constant goal.

To repeat, three dangers which can damage our faith and harm or destroy our testimonies are arrogance and pride, serious transgressions, and the substitution of peripheral pursuits and values for Christ and the central core gospel ideals and standards.

As I prepared for this moment, the backyard lawn was beginning to look

green again, but the sprinkler on the front lawn shut down without warning. One must not become weary with well-doing (see D&C 64:33). Our testimonies, like our lawns, can wither.

Grow and serve

At this point you may be asking, "So what?" I shall limit myself to two exhortations, one to all the members of the Church and one to the leadership of the Church.

First, to grow in light and testimony we must magnify our Church callings throughout our lives, our entire lives. By this means, combined with spontaneous Christian service, we will never lose our testimonies. They will grow brighter and greener.

And then finally, to the Church leaders: please ordain men to the priesthood and extend a call to every brother and sister, active or less-active, giving each an opportunity to serve others and to apply gospel principles. One Church calling for each member is an ideal which we can reach in most places. I know of nothing which will do more to build testimonies and bless people.

And may I just take this opportunity to express my great love to all of you members of the Church. I love you and appreciate you and admire all the things you do. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

Elder John K. Carmack, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, has spoken to us.

We shall now hear from Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Council of the Twelve Apostles.

Elder M. Russell Ballard

Brothers and sisters, the topic I wish to address is one about which the Breth-

ren are deeply concerned. I have titled my remarks "The Hand of Fellowship."

The gospel is for all

In the New Testament we read that Peter, the head of the Church after the Savior's resurrection and ascension, was informed in a vision that the gospel is for all mankind. He said, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34-35). This same message appears in the Book of Mormon and in the Doctrine and Covenants. Every soul is to have an opportunity to hear and then accept or reject the gospel.

Extend fellowship to all

In the Church we use the word *fellowship* to describe our efforts (1) to encourage less-active members to return to full activity and (2) to help new converts make the transition into the Church following baptism. I believe those meanings are valid, but to me the word *fellowship* has a much broader connotation. I believe we members do not have the option to extend the hand of fellowship only to relatives, close friends, certain Church members, and those selected nonmembers who express an interest in the Church. Limiting or withholding our fellowship seems to me to be contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Savior offered the effects of his atoning sacrifice to all mankind. He said, "Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God" (D&C 18:10). Can we justify doing less? Let me give you a few examples that illustrate my message.

Proclaim the gospel to all

Near the end of his earthly ministry, the resurrected Jesus instructed his disciples with these words: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). That instruction is in force today and is the mandate for General Authorities, missionaries, and other members of the

Church to travel to the four corners of the world teaching the gospel.

Proclaiming the gospel to all mankind is a fundamental part of the mission of the Church. As those of you know who have supported full-time missionaries, the Church devotes very substantial resources, in time and money, to missionary work.

This big world is filled with billions of people. Today more than 35,700 full-time missionaries are combing the earth looking for those of our Father's children who will listen to the message of the Restoration. These dedicated servants of the Lord are serving in 221 missions and are teaching the gospel in 64 different languages. We expect that approximately 245,000 converts will be baptized during 1988. This number is impressive; however, approximately that same number of people are being born in the world every day.

In the missionary training centers, we teach the missionaries that they must have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They are taught that they need to develop genuinely warm, personal, caring relationships with those whom they meet. They must learn to listen with understanding and to show sincere sensitivity to the interests and concerns of those they teach. As missionaries teach the doctrines, they need to find out what their contacts think and feel so they can clarify misunderstandings, ease doubts, resolve concerns, and provide encouragement. The warm, sincere spirit of the missionaries is essential to help nonmembers feel and recognize the Spirit of the Lord, because the Spirit is the power that leads to conversion.

Welcome newcomers

Brothers and sisters, we must ever keep in mind that missionary work throughout the world requires great sacrifice, and all of this sacrifice, effort, and exhaustive preparation of missionaries may be in vain if those who accept the gospel do not receive a loving and warm welcome by the members of the Church.

We know from years of experience that the first contacts new converts have with members in wards or branches are critical to the conversion process. Recently, several of the Brethren were discussing how we accept and welcome newcomers. Two of them shared experiences with me.

Stories about fellowship

Elder Devere Harris of the First Quorum of the Seventy told me of a recent visit he made to a long-established ward in Utah. He said, "I entered there as a stranger and tried every way that I knew to strike up a conversation, or to say hello, or to be kind, or to be greeted, or to be known. Everyone ignored me; nobody would speak to me—no one!

"Finally, a man recognized me. He said, 'Oh, Elder Harris.' The bishop turned around and said, 'What did you say?' The brother said, 'This is Elder Harris of the First Quorum of the Seventy.'

"Well, things changed. It wasn't long before I was asked to sit on the stand; they wondered if I wouldn't like to bear my testimony. After the meeting, many people shook my hand. As I left, I thought, 'What a tragedy! A gray-haired man who was unknown walks into a meeting. Nobody recognizes him, nobody says hello, nobody is kind. Then, because of his Church position, everybody changes and wants to be friendly.'"

The second story involves two sisters who live two thousand miles from each other. Each was taught the missionary discussions by the full-time missionaries. Each felt the confirming witness of the Spirit and was baptized. Both were single adults in their early twenties. One sister attended church meetings, met the bishop, developed friendships with members who invited her into their homes. Ward members made her feel welcome and wanted. She was given a Church calling immediately after her baptism, and she continued to learn and live gospel principles while associating with ward and stake members. She participated continually, serving in various ward, stake,

and general Church callings. In time, she married in the temple, and she maintains her standing as a member in full fellowship.

The other sister, after receiving the witness of the Spirit, never met her bishop personally. She received no visits by home teachers or visiting teachers and was given no Church calling. For several weeks she attended Sunday ward meetings, but she was mostly ignored. In due course, the missionaries who had taught her left the area, and her interest in the gospel waned without the support of members. She was not "remembered and nourished" (Moroni 6:4). Soon she stopped attending church services, resumed her old friendships and life-style, and married a nonmember. Today she is a fine, productive, contributing citizen in her community and a loving, conscientious wife and mother. But she does not enjoy the rich blessings that come from full fellowship in the Church.

Recently, the *Church News* featured two older sister missionaries who exemplify the attributes of love and caring for others while serving on their missions in Duchesne, Utah. The stake president credited these sisters with bringing a spirit of warmth and friendship to his stake. In fact, the teaching and fellowshiping efforts of these sisters have helped change the attitude of the whole stake. The work of the Lord is more effectively coming together and influencing everyone, including the less active as well as nonmembers. The stake president said that in small farming communities, the activation of a less-active family has a big effect on others. He expects twelve to fifteen families to become active and go through the temple this year.

Brothers and sisters, we must ever keep in mind the time, effort, and other resources that missionaries and others spend to find and teach one of our Father's children. Surely, every one of us ought to be alert, looking for ways to be of service to the newcomer. We might ask ourselves how the newcomers in our wards would be treated if we were the only ones they ever met. Every member of the Church should foster the attributes

of warmth, sincerity, and love for the newcomers, as the missionaries are taught to do.

Be friendly at church

Brothers and sisters, we members must help with the conversion process by making our wards and branches friendly places, with no exclusivity, where all people feel welcome and comfortable. You bishops have been given many who can help you foster fellowship. Teach the children, youth, and adults that being warm and friendly are Christlike qualities. In your ward council meetings, consider ways to improve the feeling of fellowship in your ward. Be sure the missionaries introduce you to every investigator before he or she is baptized.

Assign someone to greet at the doors, paying special attention to newcomers and guests. On occasion, use priesthood and Relief Society meetings to teach home and visiting teachers how to fellowship all who live within the ward. Take advantage of the flexibility you have in using high priests and stake and full-time missionaries to lead the less active and new converts into full fellowship. In the true spirit of shepherding, bishoprics can help create a friendly atmosphere by mingling with members when they are gathering together.

True Christian fellowship

Brothers and sisters, my message is urgent because we need to retain in full fellowship many more of the new converts and return to activity many more of the less active. I urge you to increase the spirit of friendship and pure Christian fellowship in your neighborhoods. A new convert or recently activated member should feel the warmth of being wanted and being welcomed into full fellowship of the Church. Members and leaders of the Church should nurture and love them as Jesus would.

In addition to welcoming and accepting recent converts and less-active members, we need to reach out and extend our friendship to others regardless of whether

they are interested in the gospel or not. We must not be too selective in identifying those we feel are worthy or appreciative of our attention. The spirit of true Christian fellowship must include everyone. Our understanding of the gospel should help us see clearly that all people are our brothers and sisters, children of our Heavenly Father. Perhaps more of us could emulate this example.

Years ago while walking up Main Street with his father, Elder LeGrand Richards, then the Presiding Bishop of the Church, tipped his hat and greeted everyone. Upon arrival at their destination, President George F. Richards, then the President of the Council of the Twelve, said, "Son, do you know all those people?" Bishop Richards responded, "Yes, Daddy, I know them all—all but their names."

Share the love of Christ

During his earthly ministry, Jesus posed this challenging question: "For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?" (Matthew 5:46). This teaching is clear. We should extend our love far beyond family, close friends, and fellow members of the Church. Our hearts should be open to everyone.

We can share the love of Christ in simple acts. For example, the warmth of a radiant smile and friendly greeting can go far in smoothing the way for good neighborly relations. Jesus posed another question: "And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?" (Matthew 5:47).

Some years ago, a friend of mine was doing some work one morning on his garage roof. He looked down and saw a load of cement being delivered to his non-member neighbor. He could see that the neighbor could use some help. My friend came down from his roof and, without being asked, carried his own cement finishing tools across the street and began helping with the job. Because he had experience doing cement work, his help turned out to be most welcome. Although the neighbor had expressed a dislike for

members of the Church, he showed genuine appreciation for this one by the end of the day. This was the beginning of a long and lasting friendship.

Jesus gave us a new commandment and said it would identify his disciples:

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34–35).

Love nonmembers unconditionally

As disciples of Christ, we need to feel genuine charity for one another. As we do, new light will come into our own lives. This charity is essential in missionary work, but we must never allow ourselves to treat our neighbors only as potential converts. We have had the sad experience of seeing members of the Church who attempted to convert their neighbors and friends and, when they did not respond, withdrew their friendship and neighborliness. We must not be so anxious to share the gospel that we become insensitive to the feelings of others.

I encourage you to build personal, meaningful relationships with your nonmember friends and acquaintances. Interest in the gospel may come later as a natural extension of a good friendship. Invitations to participate in gospel-related activities often will strengthen relationships with acquaintances. If they are not interested in the gospel, we should show unconditional love through acts of service and kindness, and never imply that we see an acquaintance only as a potential convert. Members must understand that when

a nonmember declines one invitation to investigate the gospel, he has not necessarily rejected the gospel.

Let us adhere to the counsel of the Apostle Paul and be “no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19).

Despite some well-publicized criticism to the contrary, I believe Church members want to be good friends and neighbors wherever they live, but some are shy and overly cautious. This can appear to be clannish. We must not reserve our kindness and affection only for our fellow members. We must be sensitive and not oblivious to the feelings of those whose views may differ from ours. Considering the early history of the Church in these latter days, unkindness or indifference toward others should be abhorrent to members of the Church.

I bear my testimony that “God is no respecter of persons”; we should follow his example in all of our associations with our fellowmen. I testify that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Savior of all mankind. He loves all men and looks to each one of us to do the same. May we so do I pray humbly, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

We have just heard from Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Council of the Twelve Apostles.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will be our concluding speaker, and we shall hear from him now.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell

I join in welcoming all the new Brethren, including Elder Richard Scott to the Council of the Twelve.

Years ago, Elder Scott was called as a mission president. The distinguished admiral for whom he worked was puzzled

and even upset that Elder Scott accepted that call. Later, that same admiral, a distinguished public servant, wrote a book called *Why Not the Best?* I suggest the answer to the admiral’s question concerning that call is answered in the title of his