

1973, p. 98); and "The Church is at a point in its growth and maturity when we are at last ready to move forward in a major way. . . . We have paused on some plateaus long enough. Let us resume our journey forward and upward" by President Spencer W. Kimball (in Conference Report, Apr. 1979, p. 114; or *Ensign*, May 1979, p. 82).

I bear my witness that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. This is his church; he directs it through his prophets. Joseph Smith is the prophet of the Resto-

ration. President Ezra Taft Benson is the present prophet of God. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Council of the Twelve Apostles has just spoken to us.

We shall now be pleased to listen to Elder Gene R. Cook, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

Elder Gene R. Cook

Dear brethren of the priesthood, I greet you this evening in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ with the sacred injunction, "Come unto Christ" (Moroni 10:32).

A divine commission to bring souls to God

I testify that the Lord expects us to bring souls unto Him by inviting all men to come unto Christ, and by so doing, find Him ourselves. It truly is "the thing . . . of the most worth unto you" (D&C 15:6). In fact, your very ordination is "to preach faith and repentance and remission of sins, according to [his] word" (D&C 53:3), "that you may bring souls unto [him]" (D&C 15:6). It is the greatest offering that man can give to God (see D&C 15:6, 29:7; Alma 17:11, 29:9). In fact, you "received [your] first lessons in the world of spirits and were prepared to [labor] for the salvation of the souls of men" (D&C 138:56). You cannot fail. That counsel applies to you young men as well.

Perhaps we are at the time in our ministry when, in preparation for the Lord's second coming, when with renewed emphasis, *in love*, we must call men to repentance (see D&C 6:9, 11:9, 18:14). We must invite them to "come unto Christ," testifying boldly in His name to bring the "mighty change" into the hearts of our people (see Mosiah 5:2, Alma 5:14).

The purpose of visits to homes

As Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthood brethren, we are commissioned with a purpose to "visit the house of each member" (D&C 20:47)—

- To "exhort them to pray vocally and in secret" (D&C 20:47),
- "To stir them up in remembrance" of God (Alma 4:19), and
- To turn them "to the Lord with full purpose of heart" (Mosiah 7:33).

We do not visit the active just to "visit," or the less active just to get them out to church, although that may be part of what happens. In essence, we visit to help the heads of those homes, male or female, to become the spiritual leaders in their homes, to lead their families to Christ, to pray, to fast, and to read the scriptures together. If that happens in our visits, all else will take care of itself.

"A preparation to hear the word" (Alma 32:6; see also 33:22–23, 34:3)

How can we make such visits with power and authority, as described in the scriptures, especially to the less active? The most important element in our preparation is to humble ourselves mightily before God. We must be believing (see D&C 90:24, Mormon 9:27). We must not doubt or fear (see D&C 6:36).

We must pray fervently throughout our visits that we may “speak the thoughts that [the Lord] shall put into your hearts, and you shall not be confounded before men; for it shall be given you . . . in the very moment, what ye shall say” (D&C 100:5–6), even “that portion that shall be meted unto every man” (D&C 84:85).

The results of these kinds of visits testify of themselves. For example:

- On a first visit, a man quits smoking after twenty-five years and prays to God to know the next step.

- A less-active man says, “I’ve been waiting for you.”

- A wife tells of her less-active husband’s dream that “messengers would be sent” and says, “We will believe whatever you tell us.”

- An unscheduled phone call is made at a critical moment, touching a woman who was turning to inactivity.

Someone said, “Coincidences like these are God’s little miracles wherein he desired to remain anonymous.”

Suggestions for preparing men’s hearts

Remember, not only the teacher but the learner must have the Spirit of the Lord. You, as the teacher, must do all in your power to *prepare the hearts of men* so the Spirit can teach. May I suggest seven scriptural performances (see Alma 31:10) that, if humbly employed, will immediately invite the Spirit into your heart and the hearts of others. You may want to write them down.

1. Pray. Pray for the Spirit. Ask those you teach to pray for you and for themselves while you are teaching. Ask for discernment to understand the needs of those you visit (see 3 Nephi 17:2–3, 20:1; D&C 136:29, 32). For example:

- During a visit, upon bended knee, two priesthood leaders pray that a wayward daughter will be blessed. Her parents are touched by the prayer and repent that very evening. They begin to attend church and a temple preparation seminar and now have been sealed as a family.

- A seven-year-old responds to his less-active father, who says he won’t pray, with “Please pray, Dad. Take Mom

and me to the temple.” That family has since been sealed.

2. Use the scriptures. They are the words of the Lord to us, and the Spirit of the Lord will speak through them to all, both young and old (see 2 Nephi 32:3, Alma 31:5, D&C 32:4). For example:

- In one of the visits, a testimony is given of a verse relating to baptism. An investigator says, “I do believe God sent you. I’ll be baptized.”

- A scripture is read on another visit about multiplying and replenishing the earth. A young couple with one child humbly confesses their unrighteous decision to have no more children.

3. Testify. If you follow His promptings, the Lord will direct you to testify frequently throughout these visits. Testify that the Lord has sent you. As you do, “the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men” (2 Nephi 33:1; see also Alma 5:44–47). Let me again illustrate:

- In his testimony, a priesthood leader unknowingly quotes a sentence verbatim from a sister’s patriarchal blessing.

- Another visit: one member testifies to a couple of life after death from the scriptures only to learn later of the recent loss of their little one.

4. Use music. Using recorded hymns or singing the songs of Zion with or to the Saints in their homes, as prompted, will always bring the Spirit of the Lord (see D&C 25:12, Matthew 26:30, Colossians 3:16, 1 Samuel 16:23). For example:

- A priesthood leader said with a smile, “I could never sing, I have a terrible voice. But we were prompted to do so. My voice was as the voice of an angel.” The less-active man wept and returned to the Church.

- A home teacher said, “I sang with his children. The crusty old fellow cried and humbled himself for the first time in years.”

5. Express love and gratitude to God and man. Express love openly for God and for His children, and the Spirit will be felt profoundly (see John 13:34–35, 1 Nephi 11:21–23, Moroni 7:47–48). Let me illustrate:

• Touched by the spirit of a visit, a less-active teenager expresses love for his parents, by whose love his heart is turned to God.

• A priesthood leader expresses love to a dissident group of less-active members, and twenty return to sacrament meeting that same day.

6. *Share spiritual experiences.* Spiritual experiences have great impact upon men's souls. Share them as prompted by the Spirit (see D&C 50:21–22, Luke 10:25–37, Acts 26:1–32). For example:

• A less-active husband tells two priesthood leaders of last night's dream. He repents that very evening as he recounts the experience.

• Two priesthood leaders tell an inspiring missionary story. As a result, two less-active sons are now serving missions.

7. *Perform priesthood ordinances.* "In the ordinances . . . , the power of godliness is manifest" (D&C 84:20). Bless the Saints. Bless the sick. Bless the homes of the Saints. Encourage others to seek for priesthood blessings (see 3 Nephi 20:2–9). For example:

• In an unscheduled visit by an institute director, a blessing is received by a college woman who has strayed into transgression. She is caused to remember God and returns to the institute.

• Another man is raised directly from his sickbed.

• A daughter receives a priesthood blessing and finds the peace that has eluded her since her father's death.

Brethren, these seven suggestions—one or more as needed—will always bring the Spirit of the Lord into your visits. Are these not some of the *spiritual gifts* that Christ gave that prepared the way for the Holy Ghost to testify and *change men's hearts*? Spiritually give of yourself, and your visits will not then be routine, but you will discern the needs of the Saints. You will commit them in the Spirit to act. They will repent and come unto Christ.

Yes, it's true, there are a few sheep who will not respond to their Master's voice, who are not willing at this time—

and I repeat, *at this time*—to respond, because Jesus taught that He could only "bring all men unto him, on conditions of repentance" (D&C 18:12; italics added).

With those souls, we just go on loving them and try again at a later time when they may have a more repentant heart and will respond to the Spirit (see 3 Nephi 18:32).

A sister's visit

May I share a personal experience of my wife. While on a stake conference assignment with me, she accompanied a Relief Society president on such a visit. As shepherds and servants of the Lord, they had tremendous success.

Then, about a year later while I was teaching some priesthood brethren how to make such visits, a 35-year-old man told me of my wife's visit a year ago and said: "May I tell you a secret? My entire family had decided the day before your wife came to visit that we were leaving the Church, offended, never to return. I bear witness to you that we felt the Lord speak through her as she stirred us up in remembrance of God and our ordinances. I'm a member of a bishopric now. I would not be here today if it were not for her."

He then smiled and said, "How I wish now that I had more carefully watched her invite the Spirit upon me and my family, as it now falls upon me to go out tonight and do my very first home visit."

Yes, brethren, the sisters can assist in this work also.

The divine motivation

May I then summarize:

1. We are to be instruments in the Lord's hands to bring souls to Christ. Perhaps this is the greatest gift one man can bestow upon another.

2. We must better *relearn* how to invite the Spirit of the Lord for such an endeavor, even humbling self "to the dust" (Alma 34:38).

3. The process described works for all men, young and old, who qualify with "faith, hope, charity and love, with an eye single to the glory of God" (D&C 4:5). You young men, encourage your fathers and companions to hold such visits. You have a right to be shown how, and to motivate and teach us as well.

4. Remember, these suggestions are not meant to change the processes for home teaching, visiting teaching, or auxiliary visits, but are a suggested *means* for bringing the Spirit into all such visits.

5. The process described for inviting the Spirit works the same with—

- a rebellious child at home,
- a discouraged individual,
- an associate, and
- even yourself,
- as well as in visits to homes.

6. Let us commit as one leader did: "There will not be one less-active member who has turned from God in my quorum or class. I will do all in my power to see that mighty change come into his heart."

In conclusion, may I remind each of us that our motivation must not be just for duty, for the Church, or as a result of a calling we have, but our *divine motivation* must be for the love of God. Then will the miraculous results occur.

I bear witness from the Book of Mormon that *for our labor*, we will—

- "Wax strong in the Spirit, . . .

- "Teach with power and authority from God" (Mosiah 18:26),

- "Receive the grace of God" (v. 26), and

- Be restored unto the grace we once had (see Helaman 12:24).

And then, with that grace or enabling power of God, we might thereby obtain charity (see Ether 12:34, 36), "even the pure love of Christ" (Moroni 7:47).

May that gift, even charity, be ours. May we give of ourselves to the spiritually needy the spiritual gifts Christ gave. I know of no greater joy that can come to man than "the soul that repenteth" (D&C 18:13; see also vs. 15–16). May the Lord bless us to learn how to bring men to Christ, and, in the process, *find Him ourselves*, I humbly pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

Elder Gene R. Cook of the First Quorum of the Seventy has just spoken to us. We shall now invite the four brethren who were sustained this afternoon as new members of the First Quorum of the Seventy to each give us a few words of testimony or whatever they wish to say as they are guided by the Spirit: Elder Monte J. Brough, Elder Albert Choules, Jr., Elder Lloyd P. George, and Elder Gerald E. Melchin, in that order, please.

Elder Monte J. Brough

I can tell you now, after about a hundred minutes of experience, that these big red chairs are not really as comfortable as they look.

On Thursday afternoon, my family and I were celebrating my child's birthday at a rather loud and noisy gathering in our home when the phone rang. A woman's voice said, "Brother Monte Brough, would you hold the phone a moment? President Hinckley would like to speak with you."

I said, "President Hinckley!" in order to gain some attention from my rather raucous family. They quieted rather quickly, I can tell you.

President Hinckley came on the phone and said, "Brother Brough, would it be convenient for you to come and see me?"

In a rather stilted way, I responded for a moment or two to a couple of questions, then said, "President Hinckley, you have given me a rather frightening phone call."