

Missionaries

Full-time missionaries 47,311

Prominent members who have passed away since last April

President Ezra Taft Benson, thirteenth President of the Church, at age ninety-four, on May 30, 1994; *President Howard W. Hunter*, fourteenth President of the Church, at age eighty-seven, on March 3, 1995; *Elder Clinton L. Cutler*, a member of the Second Quorum of the Seventy;

Elder Sterling W. Sill, an emeritus General Authority; *Eudora Widtsoe Durham*, widow of Elder G. Homer Durham, a former member of the Presidency of the Seventy; *Weston Eugene Hamilton*, a member of the General Church Finance Committee; *Oakley S. Evans*, a former president of the Tabernacle Choir.

President Faust

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will be our first speaker at this session.

Elder M. Russell Ballard

Answers to life's questions

Life's most challenging questions seem to be those that begin with the word *why*. "Why is life so hard?" "Why is there so much sorrow, hate, and unhappiness in the world?" "Why does death take the young?" And "Why must the innocent suffer?" We all have wrestled with such questions from time to time as we struggle with the vicissitudes of mortality. I particularly want to talk to the younger members of God's family about why I believe the only satisfying answers to such questions come from the comforting perspective of faith in our Heavenly Father and his eternal plan for our happiness.

The prophet Alma called the plan "the great plan of happiness" (Alma 42:8). It is known more commonly as the plan of salvation. It is beautiful in its simplicity to all who seek prayerfully to know and understand the true meaning and purpose of life.

The plan of redemption

Through prophets past and present, God has revealed the doctrines of his "great plan of happiness." It consists of infinite, eternal, absolute, unchanging

principles. From Alma we learn that "God gave unto them commandments, *after* having made known . . . the plan of redemption" (Alma 12:32; italics added). The plan teaches that all who have or will live on earth are the spirit children of heavenly parents. We lived with them before coming to this earth to receive our bodies of flesh and bone.

"If Adam [and Eve] had not transgressed [they] would not have fallen, but [they] would have remained in the garden of Eden. . . .

"And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy. . . .

"Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:22-23, 25).

After the Fall, God instructed Adam to cleave unto his wife, Eve (see Genesis 2:24; Moses 3:24; D&C 42:22). "God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Genesis 1:28), a commandment that has never been rescinded.

Our Father's plan provides for redemption from the Fall through the atonement of Jesus Christ. As the Only Begotten Son of God and the only sin-

less person to live on this earth, he made a perfect atonement for all mankind. It applies to everyone unconditionally as it pertains to the resurrection from temporal, or physical, death, for all shall rise from the dead with immortal bodies as a result of the Atonement. However, the Atonement is conditional as it pertains to each person's individual sins. It touches everyone to the degree that he or she has faith in Jesus Christ, repents, and obeys the gospel. Exaltation and eternal life with God are reserved for those who keep the commandments.

The role of mortality in God's plan

Mortality, then, is the time to test our ability to understand our Heavenly Father's plan and, of course, our willingness to be obedient. Obedience is essential to obtain exaltation and eternal life. King Benjamin explained that "the Lord God hath sent his holy prophets among all the children of men, to declare these things to every kindred, nation, and tongue, that thereby whosoever should believe [in] Christ . . . , the same might receive remission of their sins, and rejoice with exceedingly great joy" (Mosiah 3:13).

He also taught his people: "Consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness" (Mosiah 2:41).

Learn doctrines and commandments

What a wonderful, warm, and reassuring thing it is to know that the primary objective of the very God of heaven is "the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39), or, in other words, our eternal happiness and joy. Sometimes I wonder if we really appreciate

what that means and how it should affect our lives. We must give adequate attention to the doctrines of happiness—real happiness, infinite and eternal. They should be the objective of everything we teach in the Church and of everything we do.

The Prophet Joseph Smith said, "We cannot keep all the commandments without first knowing them, and we cannot expect to know all, or more than we now know unless we comply with or keep those we have already received" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938], p. 256).

We must understand the basic doctrines and receive the saving ordinances that are essential for our eternal exaltation and happiness. Our present mortal state places a veil of forgetfulness over our minds, allowing us to prove ourselves able to "do all things whatsoever the Lord [our] God shall command" (Abraham 3:25). But even though our present long-range view of eternity is limited, the Lord has not left us without direction. He has provided scriptures and apostles and prophets through whom he has revealed his plan for our exaltation and eternal life. And we have the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, to guide us.

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that "in obedience there is joy and peace unspotted, unalloyed; and as God has designed our happiness . . . he never has—He never will institute an ordinance or give a commandment to His people that is not calculated in its nature to promote that happiness which He has designed, and which will not end in the greatest amount of good and glory to those who become the recipients of his law and ordinances" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, pp. 256–57).

The role of agency in God's plan

Critical to our knowledge of the plan of happiness is an understanding of the

great governing principle of agency. A person does not have to spend much time in the schoolroom of mortality to realize that Heavenly Father's plan does not provide for blissful happiness at every step along our mortal journey. Life is filled with harsh realities that tug at the heart and tear away at the soul.

One cannot look at suffering, regardless of its causes or origins, without feeling pain and compassion. I can understand why someone who lacks an eternal perspective might see the horrifying news footage of starving children and man's inhumanity to man and shake a fist at the heavens and cry, "If there is a God, how could he allow such things to happen?"

The answer is not easy, but it isn't that complicated either. God has put his plan in motion. It proceeds through natural laws that are, in fact, God's laws. Since they are his, he is bound by them, as are we. I recognize that for purposes we mortals may not understand, the Lord can control the elements. For the most part, however, he does not cause but he allows nature to run its course. In this imperfect world, bad things sometimes happen. The earth's rocky underpinnings occasionally shift and move, resulting in earthquakes. Certain weather patterns cause hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, and drought.

Much adversity is man-made. Men's hearts turn cold, and the spirit of Satan controls their actions. In foreseeing the day of suffering in our time, the Savior said, "The love of men shall wax cold, and iniquity shall abound" (D&C 45:27). Violence, immorality, and other evils run rampant on the earth. Much adversity has its origin in the principle of agency.

We tend to think of agency as a personal matter. If we ask someone to define "moral agency," the answer will probably be something like this: "Moral agency means I am free to make choices for myself." Often overlooked is the fact

that choices have consequences; we forget also that agency offers the same privilege of choice to others. At times we will be affected adversely by the way other people choose to exercise their agency. Our Heavenly Father feels so strongly about protecting our agency that he allows his children to exercise it, either for good or for evil.

Living the plan brings joy and peace

The plan of happiness is available to all of his children. If the world would embrace and live it, peace, joy, and plenty would abound on the earth. Much of the suffering we know today would be eliminated if people throughout the world would understand and live the gospel.

We mortals have a limited view of life from the eternal perspective. But if we know and understand Heavenly Father's plan, we realize that dealing with adversity is one of the chief ways we are tested. Our faith in our Heavenly Father and his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, is the source of inner strength. Through faith we can find peace, comfort, and the courage to endure. As we trust in God and his plan for our happiness with all our hearts and lean not unto our own understanding (see Proverbs 3:5), hope is born. Hope grows out of faith and gives meaning and purpose to all we do. It can give us comfort in the face of adversity, strength in times of trial, and peace when we have reason for doubt or anguish.

Make decisions based on God's plan

By focusing on and living the principles of Heavenly Father's plan for our eternal happiness, we can separate ourselves from the wickedness of the world. If we are anchored to the correct understanding of who we are, why we are here on this earth, and where we can go after this mortal life, Satan cannot threaten our happiness through any form of temptation. If we are determined to live by

Heavenly Father's plan, we will use our God-given moral agency to make decisions based on revealed truth, not on the opinions of others or on the current thinking of the world.

For example, we are moving into an era when the information superhighway will have the capacity to cut a wide path right into our homes. With fiber-optic computer technology, it can link homes to an incredible assortment of messages and influences. This highway will be the conduit of information that will have the power to change our culture and, thus, our very lives. As we consider the importance of nourishing our intellects with the promising potential of superhighway resources, we must be ever cautious about the choices of programs and the impact of media in our lives. Those who understand our Heavenly Father's eternal plan for the joy and happiness of his children will be better prepared to make good choices as the information superhighway rolls across the world. The computer, television, satellite, microchip, and even the telephone, all can bless and enhance our lives—or can make them miserable.

This is why making life's decisions based on our Heavenly Father's plan is so important. If we truly believe that we are his children and are here on earth to learn to live, by faith, the teachings and the commandments of God and his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, we will make the choices that will qualify us to one day return to live in their presence.

Obey commandments to find happiness

Understanding the gospel of Jesus Christ and following him as our Savior and our Redeemer will influence every aspect of our lives, including all of our individual choices. Those who live according to Heavenly Father's eternal plan will not want to absorb any information that is illicit or untoward, nor will they destroy their spiritual sensitivity through immoral

acts or the consumption of any harmful substances. Neither will they search for doctrinal loopholes to find reasons to challenge the ordained leadership of the Church nor tamper with the simple truths of the gospel. They will not attempt to justify any lifestyle that is contrary to the plan of happiness. If they do any of these things, they will never find the inner peace and joy that living the gospel brings. All of our Father's children can seek prayerfully to know who they are and can find real happiness if they obey God's commandments and endure to the end. Elder Howard W. Hunter said:

"There is nothing sad or gloomy about a person who accepts the truths of the gospel and incorporates these principles in his daily living. God wants all of his children to be joyous and glad, and we can have this blessing if we are willing to keep his commandments and live by his word in all that we do" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1961, p. 108).

Answers are found in the gospel

When the plan of our Heavenly Father is understood, the answers to life's questions are found in the gospel of Christ. May we learn to accept with faith the doctrines and teachings of the gospel and accept the plan of salvation with believing hearts and minds. Always know, brothers and sisters, that the leaders of the Church understand and accept the gospel plan and will defend it at all times and in all places.

My testimony coincides with the testimony of the beloved Apostle John: "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13:17). May we search for the doctrines and commandments of the great plan of happiness; and when we learn them, may we embrace them willingly. By doing so we will find lasting joy, happiness, and peace. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth,

give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

I leave you my testimony that the Lord's promise of peace comes from knowing and living the principles of our Heavenly Father's plan of happiness. May his peace and joy be with all of us. I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Faust

We have listened to Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Elder Henry B. Eyring, who was sustained this morning as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, will be our next speaker. He will be followed by Sister Aileen H. Clyde, second counselor in the general Relief Society presidency.

Elder Henry B. Eyring

Becoming more humble

Many years ago I went on assignment to Brazil. As part of the trip I was to travel by car from São Paulo to a conference in a city about two hours distant. A member of the Quorum of the Twelve was going to preside at that conference. I hoped to ride in the car with him so that I might learn. But he suggested that I make the trip in another car with missionaries. He said, "Teach them while you travel."

When I climbed into the front seat of the car, I learned that two young lady missionaries, companions, were going to that city for a transfer. After we had become acquainted, I leaned back over the seat and asked, "What would you like to know about?" Both of them, eagerly and almost in chorus, said, "Tell us how we can become more humble."

You might have struggled with that as I did. I only remember the green hills of Brazil going by as I tried—and the feeling at the end that I failed. If only I could have that chance again on this beautiful day. I have learned some things about their question since President Hinckley invited me to meet with him yesterday afternoon and issued the call to this sacred office. I think I could help them a little more now.

"Always remember him"

First, I would have realized that they already had the first lesson in their hearts. The fact that they even asked meant that they had gone beyond being overwhelmed by their doubts about themselves to hope that if they would just submit, if they could just learn what to do, they could be better. If I had the chance again, I would have told them that. And then I would have given them just this one bit of counsel—counsel about what to do. I would have said just this: "Always remember him" (Moroni 4:3; 5:2; D&C 20:77, 79).

I would have tried to help them do that by taking them in their minds to a garden where they would hear the Savior of the world's words: "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

And then I would have taken them forward in time to that glorious day reported in the Book of Mormon when the resurrected Lord appeared to the people in the Americas and said, "And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which