

Elder F. Burton Howard

Playing hide-and-seek in the car

When my wife and I were first married, my parents lived in another state. During a break in our university schedule, we decided to go visit them.

We made sandwiches, packed the car, and prepared a bed in the backseat for our young son so that he could rest during the 10-hour trip. After a full day in the car, we were beginning to get on each other's nerves. The preschooler never slept and seemed to gather energy as the day wore on. We knew that if he would just close his eyes and be quiet for a while, he would fall asleep.

After sundown, with two hours of travel still to go, we decided to play a game. The purpose of the game was to try to get an exhausted youngster to sleep. We called it hide-and-seek. Have you ever tried to play hide-and-seek in a car? Let me tell you how we did it. We said to the small boy in back, "Let's play hide-and-seek." He enthusiastically agreed. We said, "Close your eyes and don't open them until we call you. We need time to hide."

The game started. A front-seat passenger would crouch down in the seat and 10 or 15 seconds later would call, "OK." Our son would bound over the seat and say, "Aha, I found you!" We would say, "Next time we will hide better. Close your eyes again." A minute or more would go by. Then we would call, and again he would energetically climb over the seat to find us. Finally we said, "We have a really good place to hide this time. It will take longer. Close your eyes and we will call you."

A minute, two minutes, five minutes went by. We drove along in silence. The tranquillity was marvelous. We must have traveled 15 miles before we began to whisper quiet congratulations to ourselves on the success of our devious game. Then, from out of the backseat,

came the sobbing voice of a heartbroken little boy. "You didn't call me, and you said you would."

"You didn't do what you agreed to do." What a terrible accusation. It was a defining moment in our lives. We knew that we could never play that game again.

Live up to commitments

Church members commit to do many things. We agree to serve one another, to mourn with those that mourn, to comfort those that stand in need of comfort. We promise to visit each other. We make covenants. We agree to share the gospel and do vicarious work for the dead. And just like that incident in the car so many years ago, we sometimes fail to do what we have agreed to do.

Our justifications are many. We say we will do it later. We have something more important to do right now. We don't feel well or we don't feel qualified or we don't want to be fanatical about it.

When I think of those who want to postpone performance until another time, I remember a question someone once asked at a stake conference. A man said, "Brother Howard, do you know why we can never get more than 83 percent home teaching in the Church?" I said, "No, why?" He said, "Because no one wants to go on Halloween and New Year's Eve."

When I hear someone say they can't serve because they don't feel well, I remember a stake I once visited in Mexico. The stake president spoke about a lesson he learned from his wife. He said that a week before the conference, he had scheduled some home teaching visits but came home from work and didn't feel well. He told his wife that he guessed he wouldn't go home teaching because he was sick. Her reply to him was, "Go sick!" And he went.

I once talked with a man who said, "I know I could do a little more, but no one wants to be a fanatic." His statement reminded me of a definition I heard once: "A fanatic is a person who does what he thinks the Lord would do if only He had all the facts." But He who really does know all things isn't a fanatic; neither are those who do what He would have them do.

When I listen to people say they have something more important to do, I wonder what it could possibly be. What could be more important than keeping a commitment we have made with the Lord?

As I travel the Church I often ask stake presidents what their concerns are and what they perceive to be their greatest need. Frequently the reply is, "We have wonderful people. Some of them just need to be more committed and more dedicated. They need to be more anxiously engaged in the work."

The Church does have many needs, and one of them is for more people who will just do what they have agreed to do, people who will show up for work and stay all day, who will quietly, patiently, and consistently do what they have agreed to do—for as long as it takes, and who will not stop until they have finished.

The commitment of Abraham's servant

One of my heroes has always been the servant of Abraham who was sent to find a wife for Isaac. We do not know his name. We do not know much about his life, but we know a great deal about his character. It was he who governed everything that Abraham had. He was trustworthy and he was trusted. The day came when Abraham put into the care of this servant the most important matter of all—the exaltation of his son.

He wanted Isaac to be an heir of the covenant which he had made with the

Lord. He knew that the blessings of that covenant could not be realized if Isaac didn't marry a good and worthy woman who believed in God. No woman in the land of Canaan was capable of being the mother of Israel. So Abraham asked his servant to promise that he would not permit his son to marry a Canaanite. Instead Abraham sent him to the land of his fathers to find a wife for Isaac.

The servant accepted the commitment and set out on his journey. He traveled many days. He must have encountered trials and hardships. When he finally arrived at his destination, he found many young women there. He devised a test to see which of them was foreordained to be Isaac's wife. By exercising his faith, he met Rebekah and arrived at the home of her family and was befriended by them. They invited him to dinner. After days in the desert, and despite his hunger and thirst, this faithful servant said, "I will not eat, until I have told mine errand" (Genesis 24:33).

So it was. He explained the purpose of his journey and his oath to Abraham. One simple statement conveyed his faithfulness and humility. "I am Abraham's servant," he said (Genesis 24:34). The kinsfolk wanted a 10-day celebration. The servant replied, "Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master" (Genesis 24:56).

Many would have tarried. Others would have justified unwinding a little by saying that the journey had been long or that they were tired or hungry or thirsty. Some, not wanting to appear too zealous, would have stayed.

A few, not understanding the significance of the errand, might have tried to talk Abraham out of the assignment, claiming that it was foolishness to travel so far in search of a wife. Some would not have had the faith necessary to discover which of all of the young women of the city was the chosen one. Yet this ser-

vant did. He knew how to magnify his calling and accomplish that which he had promised his master. He understood a very important truth. Promises are not just pretty words. Promises have eternal consequences.

A covenant-keeping people

We are a covenant people. If there is a distinguishing feature about members of the Church, it is that we make covenants. We need to be known as a covenant-keeping people as well. Making promises is easy, but to follow through and do what we have promised is another matter. That involves staying the course, being constant and steadfast. It means keeping the faith and being faithful to the end despite success or failure, doubt or discouragement. It is drawing near to the Lord with all our hearts. It is doing whatever we promise to do with all

our might—even when we might not feel like it.

I once attended a funeral service with Elder M. Russell Ballard. A statement he made there has remained with me to this day. He said, "Life isn't over for a Latter-day Saint until he or she is safely dead, with their testimony still burning brightly." "Safely dead"—what a challenging concept. Brothers and sisters, we will not be safe until we have given our hearts to the Lord—until we have learned to do what we have promised.

May we do so is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

Elder F. Burton Howard of the Seventy has just spoken to us.

We shall now be pleased to listen to Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

We all welcome these newly sustained Brethren and their wives to the sweet association enjoyed by the General Authorities and their families.

A handful of meal and a little oil

In response to King Ahab's great wickedness, the Lord, through the prophet Elijah, sealed the heavens, that neither dew nor rain should fall throughout all the land of Israel. The drought that ensued and the famine that followed affected Elijah himself as well as untold others in the process.

Ravens did bring Elijah bread and meat to eat, but unless ravens carry more than I think they do, this was not a gourmet meal. And ere long the brook Cherith, near which he hid and from which he drank, ran dry. And so it went for three years.

As the prophet prepared for a final confrontation with Ahab, God commanded Elijah to go to the village of Zarephath, where, He said, He had commanded a widow woman to sustain him.

As he entered the city in his weary condition, he met his benefactress, who was undoubtedly as weak and wasted as he. Perhaps almost apologetically the thirsty traveler importuned, "Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink." As she turned to meet his request, Elijah added even more strain to the supplication. "Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand [also]."

Elijah's pitiful circumstances were obvious. Furthermore, the widow had been prepared by the Lord for this request. But in her own weakened and dispirited condition, the prophet's last entreaty was more than this faithful little