

preparation? I know it is. I've seen it done.

Therefore, if you want to get an A in the classroom, continual daily dedication is the answer. If you want to get an A in your celestial goals, the same daily technique needs to be applied.

Young friends, it is very difficult to cram for a mission, and it is equally difficult to cram for a temple marriage. Don't take the risk. Be wise. Prepare yourselves daily. Study the scriptures. Communicate with your Heavenly Father in prayer. Attend seminary. Keep yourselves clean and prepared. Understand that what happens on Friday night will ultimately impact your celestial future.

You will receive celestial blessings

If these seemingly little things seem tiresome, tedious, or time consuming, carry on! The little things that confound the wise also confound Satan. Remember, celestial blessings are on their way.

How else can you protect yourself against the pressures and evils of the world? Three hours of church on Sunday? Not likely. Just like in your studies, a concerted daily effort is the only sure way to come out victorious. The Lord wants you to succeed, and He will be with you. He will help you and support

and sustain you in your time of need if you are true to His plan. If you stay close to Him on a daily basis, He will stay close to you, and you will reap untold blessings in every aspect of your life, especially the most important, the spiritual.

And when the day comes to enter the classroom door of the temple, you will be at peace, your conscience will be clean, your self-confidence high, and you will know in your heart that you will receive an A in the most important of all your subjects: your celestial future.

Young brothers and sisters, it will ultimately be your love of the Lord which will help you commit and then stay true to your celestial daily plan. I know the Lord lives and His desire and hope for us all is a celestial future. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

Elders Eran A. Call and Richard J. Maynes of the Seventy have spoken to us.

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will be our next speaker, and he will be followed by Elder Richard G. Scott, also of the Quorum of the Twelve, who will be our concluding speaker at this session.

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin

My beloved brothers and sisters, it is a privilege for me to meet together with you in another general conference of the Church. In these wonderful gatherings, I love to hear the word of the Lord and feel the presence of His Spirit. My heart is warmed by the fellowship we share as Latter-day Saints.

Companionship with the Saints

One of the many benefits of membership in the Church is that of compan-

ionship with the Saints. During the time of my assignment in Europe, we held memorable stake conferences for the military servicemen in Germany. Many of our good brothers and sisters drove long distances to attend the meetings. A number of them arrived the night before and slept on the floor of the cultural hall. No matter the sacrifice, they came with glad hearts seeking the companionship of fellow Latter-day Saints and the chance to be instructed and edified by

Church leaders. When we come together, we are “no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.”¹

Ours is the commandment and the blessing to “meet together oft, to fast and to pray, and to speak one with another concerning the welfare of [our] souls.”² In general conferences and in other Church meetings around the world, we come together seeking companionship—the good company of brothers and sisters in the gospel and the comfort of sweet communion with the Spirit of God. In our worship services, the presence of that Spirit fills our hearts with love for God and for our fellow Saints.

Companionship of family

Of course, our best friends are those with whom we live as members of our family. Loving parents, brothers and sisters, children, and the extended family help to shape our destiny. My best friend is Elisa—my eternal companion. She is the heart of our home and has inspired us to draw nearer to the Lord. “Motherhood is near to Divinity. It is the highest, holiest service to be assumed by mankind. It places her who honors its holy calling and service next to the angels.”³ Her service is exemplified by the words of a familiar hymn:

Each life that touches ours for good
Reflects thine own great mercy,
Lord;

Thou sendest blessings from above
Thru words and deeds of those who
love.

What greater gift dost thou bestow,
What greater goodness can we know
Than Christlike friends, whose gentle
ways

Strengthen our faith, enrich our
days.⁴

The sweet companionship of eternal marriage is one of the greatest blessings God has granted to His children. Certainly, the many years I have shared with my beautiful companion have brought me the deepest joys of my life. From the beginning of time, marital companionship of husband and wife has been fundamental to our Heavenly Father’s great plan of happiness.

Our lives are touched for good, and we are both edified and ennobled as we savor the sweet blessings of association with dear members of the family.

Companionship of friends

The compassion of Christlike friends deeply touches and changes our lives. We should well remember that the Lord often sends “blessings from above / Thru words and deeds of those who love.” Love is the very essence of the gospel of Christ. In this Church, prayers for help are often answered by the Lord through the simple, daily service of caring brothers and sisters. In the goodness of genuine friends, I have seen the reflected mercy of the Lord Himself. I have always been humbled by the knowledge that the Savior regards us as His friends when we choose to follow Him and keep His commandments.⁵

Pioneer cooperation

Our pioneer sesquicentennial celebrations this year have reminded us of the strength that our forebears found in working together. They had a great spirit of cooperation. It took a companionship to pull their handcarts. These wagon trains and handcart companies were communities on wheels. By revealed design, the pioneers traveled in well-organized companies with clear lines of responsibility. The strong helped bear the burdens of the weak. Through the spirit of cooperation they overcame

great hardship and established Zion in the West.

Companions in Church service

Many of our assignments in the Church are shared with companions. Ever since the Lord sent out His disciples two by two, companionships have advanced the work of the Kingdom. The Lord's law of witnesses requires that "in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established."⁶ When the grieving women came to the empty tomb that first glorious Easter morn, it was two heavenly messengers who declared, "He is not here, but is risen."⁷

After the Lord's ascension from the Mount of Olives, two messengers bore testimony of the risen Lord. And both the Father and the Son *together* visited Joseph Smith to begin the glorious work of the Restoration. In bearing testimony and establishing truth, two are better than one.

Building on this divine model, the home teaching and visiting teaching programs of the Church have thus been organized. Companionships are called "to watch over the church always, and be with and strengthen [others]."⁸ We would hope that new converts would be given special attention by home teachers and visiting teachers. All assigned brothers and sisters may magnify their responsibilities to care for and nurture those whom they are called to serve. Local leaders prayerfully make these assignments under the direction of priesthood authority and the spirit of revelation. So when your leaders ask you to serve, we hope that you will respond as if the Lord Himself were asking because, indeed, so He is: "Whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same."⁹

When you visit your assigned members, you bring with you the light of the gospel, the love and Spirit of the Lord. Those who are strong can help "bear the

infirmities of the weak."¹⁰ Work closely with your assigned companion to carry out your visits with all diligence, and remember that companions can bless and strengthen each other as well as ministering to those they visit. President Hinckley has pleaded with us to do all we can to comfort our brothers and sisters "who cry out in pain and suffering and loneliness and fear. . . . Lift them in the spirit of love into the embrace of the Church."¹¹

Companionships also constitute the basic organization in the 318 missions of the Church. Just as the disciples of old, our more than 56,000 missionaries go two by two "into all the world"¹² to proclaim the good news of the gospel. In this wonderful work of saving souls, there is tremendous fellowship and camaraderie. When Alma was reunited with the sons of Mosiah after 14 years of missionary service, he "did rejoice exceedingly to see his brethren; and what added more to his joy, they were still his brethren in the Lord."¹³ Missionary reunions are still a great time of rejoicing.

Once people "have gotten into this strait and narrow path, . . . [they] must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ."¹⁴ President Hinckley has asked us repeatedly to extend the hand of fellowship to newly baptized members. He reminds us that "it is not an easy thing to become a member of this Church."¹⁵ New converts need to form new friendships; they need constant companions who encourage them, answer their questions, and "keep them in the right way."¹⁶

Companionship of the Holy Ghost

In our weekly sacrament meetings, we "partake of bread and [water], in remembrance of the Lord Jesus,"¹⁷ to keep His commandments that we may be worthy of the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost. It is one of the choicest blessings that we can receive. Faith in Christ, repentance, baptism, and confir-

mation, followed by virtuous living, qualify us to receive the guiding companionship of the Spirit of God. It is through the power and influence of the Holy Ghost that the Lord keeps His promise to be with us always and "not leave [us] comfortless."¹⁸ As a caring touch comforts a frightened child in the night, so the warmth of the Holy Ghost can touch our hearts and calm our fears. As the soothing voice of a loving parent can quiet the crying babe, the whisperings of the Spirit can hush the nagging worries of our lives.

As new converts receive the Holy Ghost, they experience "a mighty change . . . in their hearts."¹⁹ Great missionary that he is, President Hinckley finds his deepest satisfaction in the transformation that comes with conversion. Answering a reporter in a press interview, President Hinckley said: "The most satisfying experience I have is to see what this gospel does for people. It gives them a new outlook on life. It gives them a perspective that they have never felt before. It raises their sights to things noble and divine. Something happens to them that is miraculous to behold. They look to Christ and come alive."²⁰

Being a good companion

Valued companionships begin with a personal commitment to be an exemplary companion. I was taught the importance of such caring attention and loving personal influence many years ago on Temple Square. When I was a young man, I was on my way to a session of general conference when someone took my elbow. It was President David O. McKay. "Come with me, Joseph," President McKay said. "I'll help you find a good seat."

For those few moments as we walked toward the Tabernacle, President McKay seemed to focus his entire attention on me. He spoke reverently of his love for the Lord and his love for the members of the Church. He looked me straight in

the eye as he firmly shared his testimony with me.

"I want you to know, Joseph," he said, "that the President of the Lord's Church does receive inspiration and revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ." At that moment, the Spirit whispered to my heart that President David O. McKay was telling me the truth. I knew then that he was truly a prophet of God. That testimony has remained with me throughout my life, filling me with reverence and respect for the office our prophet holds.

I felt his love and was enriched by his humble act of kindness during those few minutes together. I don't think that I was ever quite the same after that. I then resolved that I would try to be as good a companion to others as he had been to me.

Shun false companions

For all the blessings of righteous companionship, there are also the dangers and evils of falling in with bad company. We know that there "must needs be . . . an opposition in all things."²¹ The prodigal son fell in with the wrong crowd. In the company of undesirable companions, he "wasted his substance with riotous living."²² Alma the Younger and the sons of Mosiah went about "rebellious against God"²³ and "seeking to destroy the church."²⁴ They later repented.

We know that we are often judged by the company we keep. We know how influential classmates, friends, and other peer groups can be. If any of our companions are prone to be unrighteous in their living, we are better off seeking new associations immediately. Our friends should be companions who inspire us, who help us rise to our best.

"God be with you till we meet again"

When true friends sing the well-known hymn "God Be with You Till We

Meet Again,"²⁵ we offer a prayer that the Holy Ghost will accompany our loved ones after we leave them. This hymn is a deeply moving expression of our need for companionship with one another and with the Spirit of God.

Our most common English expression of farewell is the word "good-bye," and this came to us over the years as a contraction for the expression "God be with you." In a day when people recognized our dependence on God more publicly, this wonderful phrase was used at times of departure to express love. It is still a sweet expression invoking the companionship of God during periods of separation. The phrase "good-bye," then, when fully understood, means, "If we can't be together, if we must part, if I can't be with you—then may God be with you."

Tomorrow afternoon, we will say fond good-byes to each other. May God be with each of you, my beloved brothers and sisters. May you give and receive the blessings of righteous companionship. May each of you be one who touches the lives of others for good.

I bear you my witness that God lives, that He loves His children. I know that God has called a prophet in our day, President Gordon B. Hinckley. Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, restored His true Church to bless His children. In His Church there is comfort, joy, and safety in the company of valued companions. Of these truths I bear my witness, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Ephesians 2:19.
2. Moroni 6:5.
3. "Message of the First Presidency," in *Deseret News: Weekly Church Edition*, 3 Oct. 1942, 5. Quoted in Conference Report, Apr. 1974, 9; or *Ensign*, May 1974, 8. See also Gordon B. Hinckley, in Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 90–95; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 67–70.
4. "Each Life That Touches Ours for Good," *Hymns*, no. 293.
5. See John 15:14; D&C 84:63; 93:45.
6. 2 Corinthians 13:1; D&C 6:28.
7. Luke 24:6.
8. D&C 20:53.
9. D&C 1:38.
10. Romans 15:1.
11. In Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 118; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 86.
12. Mark 16:15.
13. Alma 17:2.
14. 2 Nephi 31:19–20.
15. In Conference Report, Apr. 1997, 66; or *Ensign*, May 1997, 47.
16. See Moroni 6:4.
17. Moroni 6:6; see also D&C 20:75.
18. John 14:18.
19. See Alma 5:13; see also verses 12, 14; Mosiah 5:2.
20. In Conference Report, Apr. 1997, 68; or *Ensign*, May 1997, 48.
21. See 2 Nephi 2:11.
22. See Luke 15:13.
23. See Mosiah 27:11.
24. See Mosiah 27:10.
25. *Hymns*, no. 152.

Elder Richard G. Scott

Each member can be a missionary

There are few things in life that bring as much joy as the joy that comes from assisting another to improve his or her life. That joy is increased when those

efforts help someone understand the teachings of the Savior and that person decides to obey them, is converted, and joins His Church. There follows great happiness as that new convert is strengthened during the transition to a new life,