

No matter where we are, no matter our circumstances, we all can be faithful Latter-day Saints. We can pray and worship the Lord in the privacy of our own closet. We can sing anthems of praise to the Almighty even when we are alone. We can study the scriptures. We can live the gospel. We can pay our tithes and offerings though the amount be ever so small. We can walk in faith. We can strive to live lives patterned after the life of our Master.

Now, brothers and sisters, I invite all of you to listen to those whom you have sustained as General Authorities and general officers of the Church, as with prayer and faith and in humility, testimony is borne to you. May we all be inspired together. May our hearts be lifted in praise to our Redeemer, I humbly pray in His holy name, even the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder M. Russell Ballard

Extraordinary temple-building effort

At our last general conference, President Gordon B. Hinckley made the historic announcement that 30 or more smaller temples will be constructed throughout the world. The first of those smaller temples was dedicated this summer in Monticello, Utah. As you know, President Hinckley's stated goal is to have at least 100 temples in operation by the end of this century. Knowing the President as I do, I am sure that goal will be met, if not exceeded!

President Hinckley has referred to this extraordinary temple-building effort as "a tremendous undertaking. Nothing even approaching it has ever been tried before."¹ Ever since this stunning announcement, I have thought what great confidence the Lord and His prophet have in you and me. How much responsibility now rests upon all of us to prepare ourselves and others to be worthy of the blessings of these holy temples.

The Brethren have long been aware that many of our members live in areas of the world quite distant from the closest temple. Their hearts are true, they have great faith concerning the mission of the Church, and they love the Lord and want to do His will. What a blessing these beautiful temples will be to these dedicated Saints.

Again quoting President Hinckley: "If temple ordinances are an essential part of the restored gospel, and I testify that they are, then we must provide the means by which they can be accomplished. . . . The temple ordinances become the crowning blessings the Church has to offer."²

An urgency in the work

There is an urgency in this work that motivates us to extend the blessings of the temple to as many of our Heavenly Father's children as possible. I was impressed with an experience of President Wilford Woodruff when he told of a visitation he received from the Prophet Joseph Smith some time after the Prophet was martyred. According to President Woodruff's account: "[Joseph Smith] came to me and spoke to me. He said he could not stop to talk with me because he was in a hurry. The next man I met was Father Smith; he could not talk with me because he was in a hurry. I met half a dozen brethren who had held high positions on earth, and none of them could stop to talk with me because they were in a hurry. I was much astonished. By and by I saw the Prophet again and I got the privilege of asking him a question.

"'Now,' said I, 'I want to know why you are in a hurry. I have been in a hurry

all my life; but I expected my hurry would be over when I got into the kingdom of heaven, if I ever did.’

“Joseph said: ‘I will tell you, Brother Woodruff. Every dispensation that has had the priesthood on the earth and has gone into the celestial kingdom has had a certain amount of work to do to prepare to go to the earth with the Savior when he goes to reign on the earth. Each dispensation has had ample time to do this work. We have not. We are the last dispensation, and so much work has to be done, and we need to be in a hurry . . . to accomplish it.’”

“Of course, that was satisfactory,” President Woodruff concluded, “but it was new doctrine to me.”³

Other latter-day prophets have been similarly motivated to move us along more quickly in accomplishing the significant work of this last great dispensation. President David O. McKay encouraged every member to be a missionary.⁴ President Spencer W. Kimball urged us to “lengthen our stride.”⁵ President Howard W. Hunter affirmed, “We are at a time in the history of the world and the growth of the Church when we must think more of holy things and act more like the Savior would expect his disciples to act.”⁶

And now President Gordon B. Hinckley is asking us to carry on, to do better, to do more. He said: “We have work to do, you and I, so very much of it. Let us roll up our sleeves and get at it, with a new commitment, putting our trust in the Lord. . . . We can do it, if we will be prayerful and faithful.”⁷

Are we keeping pace?

Clearly the power of the Lord is moving on the leaders of the Church, nudging them with the same urgency that seemed to be motivating Joseph Smith in Wilford Woodruff’s vision. President Hinckley is doing all that he can do to accelerate the work. He is trav-

eling the world to an unprecedented degree to strengthen and edify the Saints and to urge them upward and onward. He has made himself available to the world media in order to share the message of the Restoration with the widest possible audience. And he is overseeing the most extensive era of temple building in history in an attempt to speed up our ability to accomplish the overwhelming amount of work we have been assigned to complete in this dispensation of time.

Our President is dynamically out in front, showing the way. The question we must all ask ourselves is, “Are we keeping pace with him?” Each one of us must be prepared to answer that question. I can assure you that it is a subject of considerable discussion among the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. I hope the same is true of every council in every ward and stake in the Church. This is not the time to relax or to coast in our callings. Every council of the Church should be working together on ways to be more effective in preparing our members to be worthy to enjoy all the blessings of the Church and especially the blessings of the temple.

We must work harder and smarter

We are rapidly approaching a time when the number of operating temples throughout the world will be double what it was just four short years ago. Now is a good time to ask, *stake presidents* and *bishops*, what are your stake and ward councils doing to fill these temples with worthy members and sufficient dedicated workers? Are your priesthood quorums functioning at peak efficiency? Are the home and visiting teachers involved in serving those families to whom they are assigned? Are your auxiliaries actively building faith and testimonies? Are the activities in your stake and ward aimed at strengthening the family and every member? Are

you carefully coordinating the proselyting efforts with the stake and full-time missionaries, helping them find, teach, and baptize many more people? Are your councils concerning themselves with helping every new convert and less-active member become fully fellowshiped and completely anchored to the doctrines of the Church?

Brothers and sisters, there is much to be done by us to complete the work assigned by the Lord to this dispensation. We must focus our work, and we must work smarter if we are to accomplish our role in preparing all Church members to receive their temple blessings. Church leaders, both men and women, can and must extend the length of their reach and broaden the power of their influence. We must be wise to protect and teach our own families first and then take full advantage of the inspired Church council system to achieve greater success in the work Heavenly Father has given us to do, within the time frame He has given us to do it.

Use ward council to nurture converts

Take, for example, the critical role of the ward council in fellowshiping every convert and activating those who are less active. As each member now knows, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles are greatly concerned over the well-being of every new and less-active member of the Church. No ward or branch council should allow a new convert to feel insecure in his newly embraced Church membership. And yet there are still too many of them who do not feel warmly welcomed.

Recently a new member wrote to me: "Sometimes I . . . feel like it was a mistake for me to be baptized. I know this Church is true, and I have a strong testimony, but I still question. . . . When I was investigating, everyone from my ward was always there for me and always wanted to talk to me and always wanted

to help me out. . . . Since I was baptized it's like they don't even notice when I go to church or when I don't. I hardly hear from anybody. . . . I just can't understand why the people in my ward have just forgotten me. I feel so lonely and confused. . . . I can't talk to my bishop because . . . we aren't close at all. He didn't even remember me when I went back to church. Please help me if you can."

Brothers and sisters, while wonderful progress has been made, the time has come when we must marshal every resource to fellowship every convert and bless the lives of many more of our Heavenly Father's children. This can best be accomplished when ward council members see that each organization does its part to make sure new members have friends, have an assignment, and are nourished by the good word of God. Every soul is very precious to our Heavenly Father. We must never forget that through the Atonement, the Lord Jesus Christ paid a great price for the redemption of each one of us. His suffering must not be in vain because we fail to nurture and teach those who are striving to be active in the Church.

Use councils to bless individual lives

You sisters can help build personal testimony in the lives of every woman, young woman, and child in the ward. How grateful we are for your strength. Sisters, talk together in your councils about how to love, support, and teach each other the beautiful blessings and promises of the gospel. How wonderful it would be if every woman in the world understood her true destiny as expressed in the Young Women theme. You know the words: "We are daughters of our Heavenly Father who loves us, and we love him. We will 'stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places . . . ' as we strive to live the Young Women Values, which are— Faith, Divine Nature, Individual Worth,

Knowledge, Choice and Accountability, Good Works, and Integrity.”⁸ Learning of and acting upon these values will save and bless both young and older women.

You members of the bishopric and Young Men presidency, get close to each young man and help him to be worthy to be ordained at the assigned age to the appropriate priesthood. This is a significant part of your work and the work of all the members of the ward council. No boy should start out as a deacon in the Aaronic Priesthood and fail to be ordained an elder and invited to serve a full-time mission.

Melchizedek Priesthood quorums are responsible for the spiritual and temporal welfare of *all* men and their *families*. Much of the work among the families of the ward that is currently being done by members of the bishopric could appropriately be performed by the men of the Melchizedek Priesthood if properly discussed and coordinated in council meetings.

Stake presidents and bishops, if your councils are not focused and functioning at this increased level of spiritual power and direction, then please do all you can to ensure that they understand how to combine all of the resources to spiritually prepare your people.

Examine commitment to the gospel

Similarly, we as individuals and families need to counsel together to carefully examine ourselves and our personal and family commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This examination is particularly essential to those of us who have made covenants of consecration and sacrifice in the house of the Lord. We need to ask ourselves: Are we setting an example of Christian virtue and gospel faithfulness in our lives and in our homes? Are we reaching out to *our* inactive and nonmember friends, family members, and neighbors with loving

concern? Are we boldly sharing our testimonies?

I know the power of inspired men and women who unitedly strive to strengthen families and individual members of the Church. Please fully utilize your combined ability to bless the lives of every person—man or woman, teenager or child, member or nonmember—who lives within the ward boundaries. Brothers and sisters, let us unite as never before to do our part, individually and collectively, to prepare our people to receive the blessings that can be given only in the house of the Lord.

Focus on things that matter most

This is our day, brothers and sisters. It is a time that has been foreseen by holy prophets since the world began. It is the dispensation of the fulness of times, when the final scenes of this world’s history will be played out. Our latter-day prophets, from Joseph Smith to Gordon B. Hinckley, have warned us of the solemn, sobering obligation that is ours to prepare for “the great and dreadful day of the Lord.”⁹ That day is steadily moving toward us, and there is still much to be done. We must be prepared to keep pace with our leaders, stride for their every lengthened stride. Perhaps as never before we need to focus our efforts on those things that matter most and avoid spending time on those things of small concern and of little consequence.

Said the Prophet Joseph Smith:

“Brethren, shall we not go on in so great a cause? Go forward and not backward. Courage, brethren; and on, on to the victory! Let your hearts rejoice, and be exceedingly glad. . . .

“Behold, the great day of the Lord is at hand. . . . Let us, . . . as a church and a people, and as Latter-day Saints, offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness; and let us present in his holy tem-

ple . . . a book containing the records of our dead, which shall be worthy of all acceptance."¹⁰

I pray that we may join together, brothers and sisters, to do our part to prepare every family, adult, youth, and child to ultimately be worthy to receive every temple blessing that the gospel provides. I bear my witness that the Lord Jesus Christ lives; it is through Him that the eternal ordinances of the temple come to the faithful members of the Church. May the Lord bless us with the desire, the wisdom, and the commitment to enthusiastically move this great work forward in our families and in the Church, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 1998, 115; or *Ensign*, May 1998, 88.
2. In Conference Report, Apr. 1998, 115–16; or *Ensign*, May 1998, 88.
3. *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff* (1946), 288–89.
4. See Conference Report, Apr. 1959, 122.
5. *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* (1982), 174.
6. In Conference Report, Oct. 1994, 118; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 87.
7. In Conference Report, Apr. 1995, 117; or *Ensign*, May 1995, 88.
8. *Young Women Leadership Handbook* (1995), 4.
9. Malachi 4:5.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 128:22, 24.

The chorus sang "Sweet Hour of Prayer."

President Hinckley

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has spoken to us, and the choir has sung "Sweet Hour of Prayer."

It will now be our pleasure to hear from Bishop H. David Burton, the Presiding Bishop of the Church. He will be followed by the choir and congregation singing "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet."

Bishop H. David Burton

A season of opportunity

In a recent sacrament meeting, a lovely young lady suggested that a good talk should begin with a little tasteful humor or an outrageous falsehood. My ability to convey humor is virtually nonexistent, but I can say with deep sincerity that I feel perfectly comfortable and free of fear as I stand at this podium.

As our recent sesquicentennial celebration concluded, our beloved prophet refocused our attention when he said: "The time has now come to turn about and face the future. This is a season of a thousand opportunities. It is ours to grasp and move forward. What a wonderful time it is for each of us to do his or her small part in moving the work of

the Lord on to its magnificent destiny" (Gordon B. Hinckley, in Conference Report, Oct. 1997, 90–91; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 67).

All of us face challenges in our daily lives. Yet in challenges lie some of our greatest opportunities. As we recognize and act on our opportunities, progress, happiness, and spiritual growth follow. We need to be involved in moving the Lord's work forward. Though the opportunities available to us are endless, may I suggest just a few.

A season to reverence the Sabbath day

Over and over again we have been reminded from this pulpit to fully observe the Sabbath day. If we are not