

the work of the organizations, each of which serves different members of the family.

Members of the council can compare what each organization is providing for each member and how much time and money are required. They can unite rather than divide families and provide watch care over single parents, the childless, the unmarried, the elderly, the handicapped—and provide much more than just activities for the children and young people.

The ward council has resources often overlooked. For instance, grandparents, while not filling callings, can help young families who are finding their way along the same path they once walked.

The Lord warned parents, "Inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, . . . that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents."<sup>11</sup>

The ward council is ideal for our present need. Here the home and the family can be anchored in place, and the Church can support rather than supplant the parents. Fathers and mothers will understand both their obligation to teach their children and the blessings provided by the Church.

### Most important things learned at home

As the world grows ever more threatening, the powers of heaven draw ever closer to families and parents.

I have studied much in the scriptures and have taught from them. I have read much from what the prophets and apostles have spoken. They have had a profound influence upon me as a man and as a father.

But most of what I know about how our Father in Heaven really feels about us, His children, I have learned from the way I feel about my wife and my children and their children. This I have learned at home. I have learned it from my parents and from my wife's parents, from my beloved wife and from my children, and I can therefore testify of a loving Heavenly Father and of a redeeming Lord. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### NOTES

1. See Doctrine and Covenants 68:25.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 20:75.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 43:8.
4. See Mosiah 18:25; Alma 6:6.
5. Malachi 4:6; see also 3 Nephi 25:5–6; Doctrine and Covenants 2:2–3.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 93:47.
7. See Doctrine and Covenants 93:41–42.
8. See Doctrine and Covenants 93:44, 50.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 93:49.
10. See Alma 12:32.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 68:25.

## Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin

### Significant dates and events in our lives

We often mark significant dates on our calendars, such as holidays and birthdays. Dates that come around every year help us measure progress in our lives. One annual event, New Year's Day, is a time of reflection and resolution.

Our baptism date, which commemorates our spiritual rebirth, is an annual occasion worthy of special note. We pause to recognize the date of our temple sealing as a special anniversary because that ordinance binds us together forever with our most cherished loved ones. Worthiness interviews, especially

annual temple recommend interviews, give us another opportunity to review our progress in fulfilling the glorious stewardship our Father in Heaven has given each of us. Certainly we must watch over and care for our own souls. On these occasions we renew covenants, affirm commitments, and establish eternal goals.

A few significant events occur only once in a lifetime. For example, in less than 15 months—454 days, to be precise—we will experience a New Year's Day when all four numerals in the calendar year will change at the same time. Public opinion polls indicate that this singular calendar change "is looming increasingly large in the public consciousness." Surveys show that people are anticipating the moment with "a very positive outlook." One forecaster said that the millennial calendar change "will be a profound milestone in people's lives, an opportunity to stop and start anew."<sup>1</sup>

### **The Savior's birth and mortal ministry**

The birth of the Savior into mortality is an event of immeasurable significance that occurred almost 2,000 years ago. In much of the world, calendar years are numbered forward and backward from the time of His birth. He taught the gospel of repentance and organized His Church, atoned for the sins of all mankind, and was crucified. He was resurrected, opening the way for all to overcome death and have our sins forgiven if we repent. His teachings established standards of human behavior that will endure eternally.

### **The Savior's Second Coming**

Perhaps in an effort to escape the challenges of our times, a few voices proclaim that the Second Coming of the Savior is imminent. Perhaps, but the Lord could not have been more plain

when He said of His triumphal return to the earth, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only."<sup>2</sup> He taught this truth on the Mount of Olives and repeated it in modern revelation through the Prophet Joseph Smith with the words, "The hour and the day no man knoweth."<sup>3</sup>

Yes, the time will come when "Christ will reign personally upon the earth."<sup>4</sup> Certainly we are closer to that time now than in 1831 when the Lord admonished the elders of the Church to "labor . . . in my vineyard for the last time—for the last time call upon the inhabitants of the earth. . . . For the great Millennium, of which I have spoken by the mouth of my servants, shall come."<sup>5</sup>

We do not know the precise time of the Second Coming of the Savior, but we do know that we are living in the latter days and are closer to the Second Coming than when the Savior lived His mortal life in the meridian of time. We should resolve to begin a new era of personal obedience to prepare for His return. Mortality is fleeting. We all have much to accomplish in preparation to meet Him.

As Latter-day Saints, "we believe all things, we hope all things. . . . If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things."<sup>6</sup> What do we believe that will motivate us to move forward? What do we hope for? What are the virtuous, lovely, or praiseworthy things we should seek after? I believe we should strive to develop within ourselves the traits of the character of the Savior.

### **Faith, hope, and charity**

The words of the Apostle Paul come to mind: "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."<sup>7</sup> These divine attributes should become fixed in our hearts and minds to guide us in all of our ac-

tions. We read in Moroni: "Cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all. . . . Whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him."<sup>8</sup> Charity can be the outward expression of faith and hope. If sought and obtained, these three foundation elements of celestial character will abide with us in this life and beyond the veil into the next life. Remember that the "same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that [you] go out of this life . . . will have power to possess your body in [the] eternal world."<sup>9</sup> We should not wait a single day to intensify our personal efforts to strengthen these virtuous, lovely, and praiseworthy attributes.

When we keep the Lord's commandments, faith, hope, and charity abide with us. These virtues "distil upon [our] soul as the dews from heaven,"<sup>10</sup> and we prepare ourselves to stand with confidence before our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, "without blemish and without spot."<sup>11</sup>

As I read and ponder the scriptures, I see that developing faith, hope, and charity within ourselves is a step-by-step process. Faith begets hope, and together they foster charity. We read in Moroni, "Wherefore, there must be faith; and if there must be faith there must also be hope; and if there must be hope there must also be charity."<sup>12</sup> These three virtues may be sequential initially, but once obtained, they become interdependent. Each one is incomplete without the others. They support and reinforce each other. Moroni explained, "And except ye have charity ye can in nowise be saved in the kingdom of God; neither can ye be saved in the kingdom of God if ye have not faith; neither can ye if ye have no hope."<sup>13</sup>

These are the virtuous, lovely, praiseworthy characteristics we seek. We all are familiar with Paul's teaching that "charity never faileth."<sup>14</sup> Certainly we need unfailing spiritual strength in our lives. Moroni recorded the revelation

"that faith, hope and charity bringeth [us] unto [the Lord]—the fountain of all righteousness."<sup>15</sup>

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the restored Church of the Lord on the earth today, guides us to the Savior and helps us develop, nurture, and strengthen these divine attributes. In fact, He revealed the qualifications required to labor in His service in these words: "No one can assist in this work except he shall be humble and full of love, having faith, hope, and charity."<sup>16</sup>

Mormon taught that "charity is the pure love of Christ" and exhorted us to "pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that [we] may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ."<sup>17</sup> Note that charity is given only to those who seek it, only to those who earnestly pray for it, only to those who are disciples of Christ. Before we can be filled with this pure love, we must start at the beginning with the first principle of the gospel. We must have "first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>18</sup>

## Faith

"Now *faith* is the substance of things *hoped* for, the evidence of things not seen."<sup>19</sup> "Faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if [we] have faith [we] hope for things which are not seen, which are true."<sup>20</sup> Latter-day Saints can rejoice in the strength of our faith because we have the fulness of the gospel. If we study, ponder, and pray, our faith in the unseen but true things of God will grow. Even if we start with only "a particle of faith, . . . even if [we] can no more than desire to believe,"<sup>21</sup> with nurturing attention a tiny seed of faith can grow into a vibrant, strong, fruitful tree of testimony.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ motivates us to repent. Through repentance, made possible by the Lord's Atonement, we can feel the calming peace of forgive-

ness for our sins, weaknesses, and mistakes. With faith in a spiritual rebirth, we are baptized and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

We strive to keep the commandments of God with faith that obedience will help us become like Him. By virtue of the Resurrection of our Savior, we have faith that death is not the end of life. We have faith that we once again will know the pleasant company and warm embrace of loved ones who have departed from mortality.

### Hope

Mormon asked the Saints of his day, "And what is it that ye shall hope for?" He gave them this answer: "Behold I say unto you that ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal, and this because of your faith in him according to the promise."<sup>22</sup> In Ether we learn that "whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope cometh of faith, [and] maketh an anchor to the souls of men."<sup>23</sup>

Even when the winds of adversity blow, our Father keeps us anchored to our hope. The Lord has promised, "I will not leave you comfortless,"<sup>24</sup> and He will "consecrate [our] afflictions for [our] gain."<sup>25</sup> Even when our trials seem overwhelming, we can draw strength and hope from the sure promise of the Lord: "Be not afraid nor dismayed . . . ; for the battle is not yours, but God's."<sup>26</sup>

### Charity

Once faith grows into a firm, abiding testimony, giving us hope in our Heavenly Father's plan of happiness; once we see through the eye of faith that we are children of a loving Father, who has given us the gift of His Son to redeem us, we experience a mighty change in our

hearts.<sup>27</sup> We feel "to sing the song of redeeming love,"<sup>28</sup> and our hearts overflow with charity. Knowing that the love of God "is the most desirable [of] all things . . . and the most joyous to the soul,"<sup>29</sup> we want to share our joy with others. We want to serve them and bless them.

### Family

"The Family: A Proclamation to the World" states clearly the sacredness of the family and that a "husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children."<sup>30</sup> Children should be taught at an early age of the sacredness of temples, and that their ultimate goal should be to go to the temple to enjoy the blessings that our Heavenly Father has in store for them. Even the tapestry of this sacred goal is given to children that will, in due time, realize this is the greatest blessing that could come to them in this life.

### Temples

The ideals of faith, hope, and charity are most evident in the holy temples. There we learn the purpose of life, strengthen our commitment as disciples of Christ by entering into sacred covenants with Him, and seal our families together for eternity across generations. Receiving our own endowment in a temple and returning frequently to perform sacred ordinances for our kindred dead increases our faith, strengthens our hope, and deepens our charity. We receive our own endowment with faith and hope that we will understand the Lord's plan for His children, will recognize the divine potential within each of us as children of our Heavenly Father, and will be faithful to the end in keeping the covenants we make.

Performing temple ordinances for the dead is a manifestation of charity, offering essential blessings to those who

have preceded us, blessings that were not available to them during their mortal lives. We have the privilege of doing for them what they are unable to do for themselves.

When President Gordon B. Hinckley announced an unprecedented number of new temples last April, he declared that "temple ordinances become the crowning blessings the Church has to offer."<sup>31</sup> He is extending these crowning blessings to more Latter-day Saints than ever before. In the house of the Lord, faithful Church members can be endowed "with power from on high,"<sup>32</sup> power that will enable us to resist temptation, honor covenants, obey the Lord's commandments, and bear fervent, fearless testimony of the gospel to family, friends, and neighbors.

This past July we were privileged to participate with President Hinckley in the dedication of the Monticello Utah Temple, the first of the new generation of temples that the Lord has directed our prophet to have built closer to the Saints. What a great spiritual experience that was to be among faithful Saints who never expected that a temple would be built in their town. These are people of great faith; some of them are descendants of the Hole-in-the-Rock pioneers, who struggled, labored, and sacrificed through many years of toil to establish Zion on the high plateaus of southeastern Utah.<sup>33</sup>

Brothers and sisters, great things are happening in the Church! We are moving forward as never before. President Hinckley's leadership is challenging us to rise to the occasion. We will attain new levels of spirituality and place our lives in closer harmony with Jesus the Christ based on how fully faith, hope, and charity become integral components of our lives. We surely will have challenges and trials, but with more assurance than ever we will have greater peace and joy, for He promised us His peace.<sup>34</sup>

## Testimony

I testify to you as a special witness that Jesus is the Christ and that through His prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, the Savior presides over His Church. May we cultivate, in preparation of His returning to this earth, His divine attributes is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## NOTES

1. *Outlook*, NFO Research, Inc., summer 1998.
2. Matthew 24:36.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 49:7.
4. Articles of Faith 1:10.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 43:28, 30.
6. Articles of Faith 1:13.
7. 1 Corinthians 13:13.
8. Moroni 7:46-47.
9. Alma 34:34.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 121:45.
11. 1 Peter 1:19.
12. Moroni 10:20.
13. Moroni 10:21.
14. 1 Corinthians 13:8.
15. Ether 12:28.
16. Doctrine and Covenants 12:8.
17. Moroni 7:47-48.
18. Articles of Faith 1:4.
19. Hebrews 11:1; italics added.
20. Alma 32:21.
21. Alma 32:27; see also verses 28-43.
22. 1 Moroni 7:41.
23. Ether 12:4.
24. John 14:18.
25. 2 Nephi 2:2.
26. 2 Chronicles 20:15.
27. See Alma 5:14.
28. Alma 5:26.
29. 1 Nephi 11:22-23.
30. *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
31. In Conference Report, Apr. 1998, 116; or *Ensign*, May 1998, 88.
32. Doctrine and Covenants 95:8.
33. See *Church News*, 1 Aug. 1998, 4.
34. See John 14:27.