

# “Chosen to Bear Testimony of My Name”

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It is wonderful to have older men of great spiritual maturity and judgment serving in the senior leadership positions of the restored Church of Jesus Christ.

In 1996 President Gordon B. Hinckley appeared on the national television news program *60 Minutes*. Mike Wallace, an experienced and tenacious journalist, interviewed President Hinckley about a number of important topics.

Near the end of their conversation, Mr. Wallace remarked, “There are those who say, ‘This is a gerontocracy. This is a church run by old men.’”

President Hinckley responded cheerfully and without hesitation, “Isn’t it wonderful to have a man of maturity at the head, a man of judgment who isn’t blown about by every wind of doctrine?” (broadcast on Apr. 7, 1996).

My purpose is to explain why indeed it is wonderful to have older men of great spiritual maturity and judgment serving in the senior leadership positions of the restored Church of Jesus Christ—and why we should “hear” and “hearken” (Mosiah 2:9) to the teachings of these men whom the Lord has “chosen to bear testimony of [His] name ... among all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people” (D&C 112:1).

I pray we may all be instructed by the Holy Ghost as we consider together this significant subject.

## A Lesson of a Lifetime

I speak about this topic from a decidedly distinctive perspective. For the last 11 years, I have been the youngest member of the Twelve in terms of chronological age. During my years of service, the average age of the men serving in the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has been 77 years—the oldest average age of the Apostles over an 11-year interval in this dispensation.

I have been blessed by the collective apostolic, personal, and professional experience and

insight of the quorum members with whom I serve. An example from my association with Elder Robert D. Hales highlights the remarkable opportunities I have to learn from and serve with these leaders.

Several years ago I spent a Sunday afternoon with Elder Hales in his home as he was recovering from a serious illness. We discussed our families, our quorum responsibilities, and important experiences.

At one point I asked Elder Hales, “You have been a successful husband, father, athlete, pilot, business executive, and Church leader. What lessons have you learned as you have grown older and been constrained by decreased physical capacity?”

Elder Hales paused for a moment and responded, “When you cannot do what you have always done, then you only do what matters most.”

I was struck by the simplicity and comprehensiveness of his answer. My beloved apostolic associate shared with me a lesson of a lifetime—a lesson learned through the crucible of physical suffering and spiritual searching.

## Human Limitations and Frailties

The limitations that are the natural consequence of advancing age can in fact become remarkable sources of spiritual learning and insight. The very factors many may believe limit the effectiveness of these servants can become some of their greatest strengths. Physical restrictions can expand vision. Limited stamina can clarify priorities. Inability to do many things can direct focus to a few things of greatest importance.

Some people have suggested younger, more vigorous leaders are needed in the Church to address effectively the serious challenges of our modern world. But the Lord does not use contemporary philosophies and practices of leadership to accomplish His purposes (see Isaiah 55:8–9). We can expect the President and other senior leaders of the Church will be older and spiritually seasoned men.

The Lord’s revealed pattern of governance by councils in His Church provides for and attenuates the impact of human frailties. Interestingly, the mortal limitations of these men actually affirm the divine source of the revelations that come to and through them. Truly, these men are called of God by prophecy (see Articles of Faith 1:5).

## A Pattern of Preparation

I have observed in my Brethren at least a part of the Lord’s purpose for having older men of maturity and judgment serve in senior leadership positions of the Church. These men have had a sustained season of tutoring by the Lord, whom they represent, serve, and love. They have learned to understand the divine language of the Holy Spirit and the Lord’s patterns for receiving revelation. These ordinary men have undergone a most extraordinary developmental process that has sharpened their vision, informed their insight, engendered

love for people from all nations and circumstances, and affirmed the reality of the Restoration.

I have witnessed repeatedly my Brethren striving diligently to fulfill and magnify their responsibilities while struggling with serious physical problems. These men are not spared from affliction. Rather, they are blessed and strengthened to press forward valiantly while suffering in and with affliction.

Serving with these representatives of the Lord, I have come to know their greatest desire is to discern and do the will of our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son. As we counsel together, inspiration has been received and decisions have been made that reflect a degree of light and truth far beyond human intelligence, reasoning, and experience. As we work together in unity on perplexing problems, our collective understanding of an issue has been enlarged in marvelous ways by the power of the Holy Ghost.

I am blessed to observe on a daily basis the individual personalities, capacities, and noble characters of these leaders. Some people find the human shortcomings of the Brethren troubling and faith diminishing. For me those imperfections are encouraging and faith promoting.

## An Additional Lesson

I have now witnessed six of my Brethren receive a transfer through physical death to new responsibilities in the spirit world: President James E. Faust, President Gordon B. Hinckley, Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, Elder L. Tom Perry, President Boyd K. Packer, and Elder Richard G. Scott.

These valiant Brethren devoted their “whole souls” (Omni 1:26) to testifying of the name of Jesus Christ in all the world. The totality of their teachings is priceless.

These servants shared with us in the concluding years of their mortal ministries powerful spiritual summaries of lessons learned through decades of consecrated service. These leaders imparted truths of great worth at a time when some may believe they had the least to give.

Consider the final teachings of great prophets in the scriptures. For example, Nephi concluded his record with these words: “For thus hath the Lord commanded me, and I must obey” (2 Nephi 33:15).

Near the end of his life, Jacob admonished:

“Repent ye, and enter in at the strait gate, and continue in the way which is narrow, until ye shall obtain eternal life.

“O be wise; what can I say more?” (Jacob 6:11–12).

Moroni completed his work of preparing the plates with a hopeful anticipation of the

Resurrection: “I soon go to rest in the paradise of God, until my spirit and body shall again reunite, and I am brought forth triumphant through the air, to meet you before the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah, the Eternal Judge of both quick and dead” (Moroni 10:34).

You and I are blessed to learn from the benedictory teachings and testimonies of latter-day prophets and apostles. The names today are not Nephi, Jacob, and Moroni—but President Faust, President Hinckley, Elder Wirthlin, Elder Perry, President Packer, and Elder Scott.

I am not suggesting the final messages of these beloved men necessarily were the most noteworthy or important of their ministries. However, the sum of their spiritual learning and life experiences enabled these leaders to emphasize eternal truths with absolute authenticity and great, penetrating power.



In his last general conference address, in April of 2007, President Faust declared:

“The Savior has offered to all of us a precious peace through His Atonement, but this can come only as we are willing to cast out negative feelings of anger, spite, or revenge. ...

“Let us remember that we need to forgive to be forgiven. ... With all my heart and soul, I believe in the healing power that can come to us as we follow the counsel of the Savior ‘to forgive all men’ [ D&C 64:10]” (“The Healing Power of Forgiveness,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2007, 69).

President Faust’s message is a powerful lesson of a lifetime from a man I love and one of the most forgiving men I have ever known.



President Hinckley testified in his last general conference in October of 2007: “I affirm my witness of the calling of the Prophet Joseph, of his works, of the sealing of his testimony with his blood as a martyr to the eternal truth. ... You and I are faced with the stark question of accepting the truth of the First Vision and that which followed it. On the question of its

reality lies the very validity of this Church. If it is the truth, and I testify that it is, then the work in which we are engaged is the most important work on the earth” (“The Stone Cut Out of the Mountain,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2007, 86).

President Hinckley’s witness affirms a powerful lesson of a lifetime from a man I love and know was a prophet of God.



Elder Wirthlin delivered his final general conference message in October of 2008.

“I still remember [my mother’s] advice to me given on that day long ago when my team lost a football game: ‘Come what may, and love it.’

“... Adversity, if handled correctly, can be a blessing in our lives. ...

“As we look for humor, seek for the eternal perspective, understand the principle of compensation, and draw near to our Heavenly Father, we can endure hardship and trial. We can say, as did my mother, ‘Come what may, and love it’” (“Come What May, and Love It,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2008, 28).

Elder Wirthlin’s message is a powerful lesson of a lifetime from a man I love and who was a living sermon of overcoming difficulties through faith in the Savior.



Elder Perry stood at this pulpit just six months ago. At that time we could not have imagined his testimony would be his last in a general conference.

“Let me close by bearing witness (and my nine decades on this earth fully qualify me to say this) that the older I get, the more I realize that family is the center of life and is the key to eternal happiness.

“I give thanks for my wife, for my children, for my grandchildren and my great-grandchildren, and for ... extended family who make my own life so rich and, yes, even

eternal. Of this eternal truth I bear my strongest and most sacred witness” (“Why Marriage and Family Matter—Everywhere in the World,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2015, 42).

Elder Perry’s message is a powerful lesson of a lifetime from a man I love and who understood through vast experience the essential relationship between family and eternal happiness.



President Packer emphasized in general conference six months ago the Father’s plan of happiness, the Savior’s Atonement, and eternal families:

“I bear witness that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of the living God. He stands at the head of the Church. Through His Atonement and the power of the priesthood, families which are begun in mortality can be together through the eternities. ...

“I am so grateful for ... the Atonement which can wash clean every stain no matter how difficult or how long or how many times repeated. The Atonement can put you free again to move forward, cleanly and worthily” (“The Plan of Happiness,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2015, 28).

President Packer’s final message is a lesson of a lifetime from a man I love and who emphatically and repeatedly declared that the purpose “of all activity in the Church is to see that a man and a woman with their children are happy at home, sealed together for time and for all eternity” (*Ensign or Liahona*, May 2015, 26).



Elder Scott proclaimed in his last general conference talk, in October 2014: “We came to mortal life precisely to grow from trials and testing. Challenges help us become more like our Father in Heaven, and the Atonement of Jesus Christ makes it possible to endure those challenges. I testify that as we actively come unto Him, we can endure every temptation, every heartache, every challenge we face” (“Make the Exercise of Faith Your First Priority,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2014, 94).

Elder Scott's message is a powerful lesson of a lifetime from a man I love and a beloved special witness of the name of Christ in all the world (see D&C 107:23).

## Promise and Testimony

The Savior declared, "Whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same" (D&C 1:38). May we hear and heed the eternal truths taught by the Lord's authorized representatives. As we do so, I promise our faith in Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ will be fortified, and we will receive spiritual guidance and protection for our specific circumstances and needs.

With all the energy of my soul, I witness the resurrected and living Christ directs the affairs of His restored and living Church through His servants who have been chosen to bear testimony of His name. I so testify in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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