

It Is All about People

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The Church is all about you, the Lord's disciples—those who love and follow Him and who have taken His name upon them.

While preparing for the construction of the magnificent Paris France Temple, I had an experience I will never forget. In 2010, when property for the temple was found, the city mayor asked to meet with us to know more about our Church. This meeting was a critical step in obtaining a building permit. We meticulously prepared a presentation that included several impressive pictures of Latter-day Saint temples. My most fervent hope was that their architectural beauty would persuade the mayor to support our project.

To my surprise, the mayor indicated that rather than reviewing our presentation, he and his team preferred to conduct their own investigation to find out what kind of church we were. The following month, we were invited back to hear a report given by a city councilor who also happened to be a professor of religious history. She said, "Above all else, we wanted to understand who the members of your church are. First, we attended one of your sacrament meetings. We sat at the back of the chapel and carefully observed the people in the congregation and what they were doing. Then we met with your neighbors—those who live around your stake center—and we asked them what kind of people you Mormons are."

"So what are your conclusions?" I asked, feeling a little bit of anxiety. She replied, "We discovered that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the closest to Jesus Christ's original Church than any other church we know of." I almost objected by saying, "That's not completely accurate! It's not the church that is closest; it *is* the Church of Jesus Christ—the same Church, the true Church!" But I restrained myself and instead offered a silent prayer of gratitude. The mayor then advised us that, based on their findings, he and his team had no objections to the construction of a temple in their community.

Today, when I think about that miraculous experience, I feel grateful for the mayor's wisdom and spirit of discernment. He knew that the key to understanding the Church is not to see it through the outward appearance of its buildings or even as a well-organized institution but through its millions of faithful members, who strive each day to follow the example of Jesus Christ.

The definition of *the Church* might be derived from a passage in the Book of Mormon that states, "And they [meaning the Lord's disciples] who were baptized in the name of Jesus were called the church of Christ."¹

In other words, the Church is all about people. It is all about you, the Lord's disciples—those who love and follow Him and who have taken His name upon them by covenant.

President Russell M. Nelson once likened the Church to a nice automobile. We all love it when our vehicle is clean and shiny. But the car's purpose is not to stand out as an attractive machine; it is to move the *people* in the car.² In the same manner, we, as members of the Church, appreciate having beautiful places of worship that are clean and well maintained, and we also enjoy having well-functioning programs. But these are merely support systems. Our sole aim is to invite each son and daughter of God to come unto Christ and to guide him or her along the covenant path. Nothing is more important. Our work is all about people and covenants.

Isn't it wonderful that the name given by revelation to the restored Church binds together the two most important elements in each gospel covenant? First is the name *Jesus Christ*. This Church belongs to Him, and His sanctifying Atonement and covenants are the only pathway to salvation and exaltation. The second name refers to *us*: the Saints, or in other words, His witnesses and His disciples.

I learned the importance of focusing on people when I served as a stake president in France. At the beginning of my service, I had in mind some very ambitious goals for the stake: the creation of new wards, the building of new meetinghouses, and even the construction of a temple in our area. When I was released six years later, not one of these objectives had been achieved. This could have felt like a complete failure except that, during the course of those six years, my objectives had become quite different.

As I sat on the stand on the day of my release, I was overwhelmed by a profound sense of gratitude and accomplishment. I looked at the faces of the hundreds of members in attendance. I could recall a spiritual experience connected with each one of them.

There were those brothers and sisters who had entered the waters of baptism, those for whom I had signed their first recommends so they could receive the sacred ordinances of the temple, and those young people and couples I had set apart or released as full-time missionaries. There were many others to whom I had ministered as they were going through trials and adversity in their lives. I felt intense brotherly love for each of them. I had found pure joy in serving them and rejoiced in their increased loyalty to and faith in the Savior.

President M. Russell Ballard taught, "What is most important in our Church responsibilities is not the statistics that are reported or the meetings that are held but whether or not individual people—ministered to one at a time just as the Savior did—have been lifted and encouraged and ultimately changed."³

My dear brothers and sisters, are we active in the gospel, or are we merely busy in the Church? The key is to follow the example of the Savior in all things. If we do that, we will naturally focus on saving individuals rather than performing tasks and implementing programs.

Have you ever asked yourself what it would be like if the Savior visited your ward or branch next Sunday? What would He do? Would He be worried to know if the visual aids were good enough or if the chairs were positioned properly in the classroom? Or would He find someone He could love, teach, and bless? Perhaps He would seek out a new member or a friend to welcome, a sick brother or sister in need of comfort, or a wavering young person who needed to be lifted and encouraged.

What classes would Jesus visit? I wouldn't be surprised if He visited the Primary children first. He would probably kneel down and speak to them eye to eye. He would express His love to them, tell them stories, congratulate them on their drawings, and testify of His Father in Heaven. His attitude would be simple, genuine, and without affectation. Can we do likewise?

I promise you that as you strive to be on the Lord's agenda, nothing will become more important than finding those people you can help and bless. At church you will focus on teaching individuals and touching their hearts. Your concern will be to foster a spiritual experience rather than organize a perfect activity, to minister to your fellow members rather than check a box for the number of visits you have made. It will not be about you but about *them* whom we call our brothers and our sisters.

Sometimes we talk about *going* to church. But the Church is more than a building or a particular place. It is just as real and alive in the humblest of dwellings in the most remote areas of the world as it is here at Church headquarters in Salt Lake City. The Lord Himself said, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."⁴

We take the Church with us wherever we go: to work, to school, on vacation, and especially in our homes. Our very presence and influence can be enough to make wherever we find ourselves a holy place.

I remember a conversation I had with a friend who is not a member of our faith. He was surprised to learn that any worthy man in our Church could receive the priesthood. He asked, "But how many priesthood holders do you have in your ward?"

I answered, "Between 30 and 40."

Perplexed, he continued, "In my congregation, we have only one priest. Why do you need so many priests on Sunday morning?"

Intrigued by his question, I felt inspired to reply, "I agree with you. I don't think we need that many priesthood holders at church on Sunday. But we *do* need a priesthood holder in every home. And when there is no priesthood holder in a home, other priesthood holders are called upon to watch over and minister to that family."

Ours is not just a Sunday church. Our worship continues each day of the week, wherever we are and in whatever we do. Our homes in particular are "the primary sanctuaries of our faith."⁵ It is most often in our homes that we pray, we bless, we study, we teach the word of God, and we serve with pure love. I can testify from personal experience that our homes are sacred places where the Spirit can abound—as much as, and sometimes even more than, in our formal places of worship.

I bear witness that this Church is the Church of Jesus Christ. Its strength and vitality come from the daily actions of millions of His disciples who strive each day to follow His supreme example by caring for others. Christ lives and He directs this Church. President Russell M. Nelson is the prophet whom He has chosen to lead and guide us in our days. Of these things I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

