

Great Love for Our Father's Children

April 2019 General Conference

Quentin L. Cook

Love is the primary attribute and motive for the spiritual purposes we were charged to undertake by our beloved prophet.

My dear brothers and sisters, this is a unique and pivotal time in history. We are blessed to live in the last dispensation before the Second Coming of the Savior. Near the commencement of this dispensation, in 1829, the year before the Church was formally organized, a beloved revelation was received, declaring that "a marvelous work" was "about to come forth." This revelation established that those who desired to serve God qualify for such service through "faith, hope, charity and love, with an eye single to the glory of God."¹ Charity, which is "the pure love of Christ,"² includes God's eternal love for all His children.³

My purpose this morning is to emphasize the essential role of that kind of love in missionary work, temple and family history work, and home-centered, Church-supported family religious observance. Love of the Savior and love of our fellow men and women⁴ is the primary attribute and motive for ministering and the spiritual purposes⁵ we were charged to undertake by our beloved prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, in the adjustments announced in 2018.

Missionary Effort to Gather Scattered Israel

I was exposed to the relationship between missionary work and love early in my life. When I was 11 years old, I received a patriarchal blessing from a patriarch who was also my grandfather.⁶ That blessing said in part, "I bless you with great love for your fellowmen, for thou shalt be called to carry the gospel to the world ... to win souls unto Christ."⁷

I understood even at that early age that sharing the gospel was based on a great love for all our Heavenly Father's children.

As General Authorities assigned to work on *Preach My Gospel* 15 years ago, we concluded that the attribute of love was essential to missionary work in our day, just as it has always been. Chapter 6, on Christlike attributes, including charity and love, has consistently been the most popular chapter among missionaries.

As emissaries of the Savior, most missionaries feel this kind of love, and when they do, their efforts are blessed. When members gain a vision of this kind of love, which is essential in assisting the Lord in His purpose, the Lord's work will be accomplished.

I was privileged to have a small role in a marvelous example of this kind of love. When I was serving as President of the Pacific Islands Area, I received a call from President R. Wayne Shute. As a young man, he served a mission in Samoa. Later, he returned to Samoa as a mission president.⁸ When he

telephoned me, he was the Apia Samoa Temple president. One of his young missionaries, when he was mission president, was Elder O. Vincent Haleck, who is now the Area President in the Pacific. President Shute had great love and respect for Vince and the entire Haleck family. Most of the family were members of the Church, but Vince's father, Otto Haleck, the patriarch of the family (of German and Samoan descent), was not a member. President Shute knew I was attending a stake conference and other meetings in American Samoa, and he asked me if I would consider staying in Otto Haleck's residence with the view of sharing the gospel with him.

My wife, Mary, and I stayed with Otto and his wife, Dorothy, in their beautiful home. At breakfast I shared a gospel message and invited Otto to meet with the missionaries. He was kind, but firm, in refusing my invitation. He said he was pleased that many members of his family were Latter-day Saints. But he forcefully indicated that some of his Samoan mother's ancestors had been early Christian ministers in Samoa, and he felt a great allegiance to their traditional Christian faith.⁹ Nevertheless, we left as good friends.

Later, when President Gordon B. Hinckley was preparing to dedicate the Suva Fiji Temple, he had his personal secretary, Brother Don H. Staheli,¹⁰ call me in New Zealand to make arrangements. President Hinckley wanted to fly from Fiji to American Samoa to meet the Saints. A certain hotel used in a previous visit was suggested. I asked if I could make different arrangements. Brother Staheli said, "You are the Area President; that would be fine."

I immediately called President Shute and told him that perhaps we had a second chance at spiritually blessing our friend Otto Haleck. This time the missionary would be President Gordon B. Hinckley. I asked if he thought it would be appropriate for the Halecks to host all of us in President Hinckley's travel group.¹¹ President and Sister Hinckley, their daughter Jane, and Elder and Sister Jeffrey R. Holland were also part of the travel group. President Shute, working with the family, made all the arrangements.¹²

When we arrived from Fiji after the temple dedication, we were warmly greeted.¹³ We spoke that evening to thousands of Samoan members and then proceeded to the Haleck family compound. When we gathered for breakfast the next morning, President Hinckley and Otto Haleck had already become good friends. It was interesting to me that they were having much the same conversation I had had with Otto more than a year earlier. When Otto expressed his admiration for our Church but reaffirmed his commitment to his existing church, President Hinckley put his hand on Otto's shoulder and said, "Otto, that's not good enough; you ought to be a member of the Church. This is the Lord's Church." You figuratively could see the resistive armor fall away from Otto with an openness to what President Hinckley said.

This was the beginning of additional missionary teaching and a spiritual humility that allowed Otto Haleck to be baptized and confirmed a little over a year later. One year after that, the Haleck family was sealed as an eternal family in the temple.¹⁴

What touched my heart throughout this incredible experience was the overwhelming ministering love exhibited by President Wayne Shute for his former missionary, Elder Vince Haleck, and his desire to see the entire Haleck family united as an eternal family.¹⁵

When it comes to gathering Israel, we need to align our hearts with this kind of love and move away from feelings of mere responsibility¹⁶ or guilt to feelings of love and participation in the divine partnership of sharing the Savior's message, ministry, and mission with the world.¹⁷

As members we can show our love for the Savior and our brothers and sisters throughout the world by making simple invitations. The new Sunday meeting schedule represents an exceptional opportunity for members to successfully and lovingly invite friends and associates to come and see and feel a Church experience.¹⁸ A spiritual sacrament meeting, hopefully as sacred as what Elder Jeffrey R. Holland described yesterday, will be followed by a 50-minute meeting focused on the New Testament and the Savior or relevant conference addresses also focused on the Savior and His doctrine.

Some Relief Society sisters have wondered why they have been given a “gathering” assignment along with priesthood quorum members. There are reasons for this, and President Nelson set forth many of them in the last general conference. He concluded, “We simply cannot gather Israel without you.”¹⁹ In our day we are blessed that approximately 30 percent of our full-time missionaries are sisters. This provides additional incentive for Relief Society sisters to lovingly share the gospel. What is needed is a loving, compassionate, spiritual commitment by each of us—men, women, youth, and children—to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. If we show love, kindness, and humility, many will accept our invitation. Those who choose not to accept our invitation will still be our friends.

Temple and Family History Effort to Gather Israel

Love is also at the center of our temple and family history effort to gather Israel on the other side of the veil. When we learn of the trials and hardships our ancestors faced, our love and appreciation for them is magnified. Our temple and family history effort has been strengthened to a significant degree by the new adjustments in both the Sunday meeting schedule and the youth advancement in classes and quorums. These changes provide for earlier and more powerful attention to learning about our ancestors and gathering Israel on the other side of the veil. Both temple and family history work are greatly enhanced.

The internet is a powerful tool; the home is now our primary family history center. Our young members are exceptionally skilled in family history research and are spiritually motivated to perform baptisms for their ancestors, whom they have learned to love and appreciate. Since the change allowing many 11-year-olds to perform baptisms for the dead, temple presidents across the world report greatly increased attendance. One temple president informs us that “there has been a remarkable increase in baptismal patrons ... and the addition of 11-year-olds brings more families. ... Even at their [young] age, they appear to sense reverence and purpose for the ordinance they are performing. It is beautiful to watch!”²⁰

I know our Primary and youth leaders are making and will continue to make family history and temple work a major effort. Relief Society sisters and priesthood brethren can lovingly help fulfill their temple and family history responsibility individually and also by assisting and inspiring children and youth to gather Israel on the other side of the veil. This is particularly important in the home and on the Sabbath. I promise that lovingly performing ordinances for ancestors will strengthen and protect our youth and families in a world that is becoming increasingly evil. I also personally testify that President Russell M. Nelson has received profoundly important revelations relating to temples and temple work.

Prepare Eternal Families and Individuals to Live with God

The new emphasis on home-centered gospel study and living and the resources that are provided by the Church are a great opportunity for lovingly preparing eternal families and individuals to meet and live with God.²¹

When a man and woman are sealed in the temple, they enter the holy order of matrimony in the new and everlasting covenant, an order of the priesthood.²² Together they obtain and receive priesthood blessings and power to direct the affairs of their family. Women and men have unique roles as outlined in "The Family: A Proclamation to the World,"²³ but their stewardships are equal in value and importance.²⁴ They have equal power to receive revelation for their family. When they work together in love and righteousness, their decisions are heaven blessed.

Those who seek to know the will of the Lord as individuals and for their families must strive for righteousness, meekness, kindness, and love. Humility and love are the hallmark of those who seek the Lord's will, especially for their families.

Perfecting ourselves, qualifying ourselves for the blessings of covenants, and preparing to meet God are individual responsibilities. We need to be self-reliant and anxiously engaged in making our homes a refuge from the storms that surround us²⁵ and "a sanctuary of faith."²⁶ Parents have a responsibility to lovingly teach their children. Homes filled with love are a joy, a delight, and a literal heaven on earth.²⁷

My mother's favorite hymn was "Love at Home."²⁸ Whenever she heard the first phrase, "There is beauty all around when there's love at home," she became visibly touched and teary. As children we were aware that we lived in that kind of home; it was one of her highest priorities.²⁹

In addition to encouraging a loving atmosphere in the home, President Nelson has focused on limiting media use that disrupts our primary purposes.³⁰ One adjustment that will benefit almost any family is to make the internet, social media, and television a servant instead of a distraction or, even worse, a master. The war for the souls of all, but particularly children, is often in the home. As parents we need to make sure that media content is wholesome, age appropriate, and consistent with the loving atmosphere we are trying to create.

Teaching in our homes needs to be clear and compelling³¹ but also spiritual, joyful, and full of love.

I promise that as we focus on our love for the Savior and His Atonement, make Him the centerpiece of our efforts to gather Israel on both sides of the veil, minister to others, and individually prepare to meet God, the influence of the adversary will be diminished and the joy, delight, and peace of the gospel will magnify our homes with Christlike love.³² I testify of these doctrinal promises and bear a sure witness of Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice in our behalf, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.