

“Come, Follow Me”

April 2019 General Conference

Russell M. Nelson

Jesus Christ invites us to take the covenant path back home to our Heavenly Parents and be with those we love.

My beloved brothers and sisters, my wife Wendy and I rejoice in being with you on this Sabbath morning. Much has happened since our last general conference. New temples have been dedicated in Concepción, Chile; Barranquilla, Colombia; and Rome, Italy. We experienced a rich outpouring of the Spirit at these sacred events.

I congratulate the many women (and men) who have recently read the Book of Mormon and discovered joy and hidden treasures. I am inspired by reports about miracles received.

I marvel at 11-year-old young men who, now as deacons, worthily pass the sacrament each Sunday. They go to the temple along with our 11-year-old young women, who are now eagerly learning and serving as Beehives. Both young men and young women are preaching gospel truths with clarity and conviction.

I rejoice with children and youth who are helping to teach the gospel in their homes as they work with their parents to follow the home-centered, Church-supported curriculum.

We received this photo of four-year-old Blake, who, early on a Saturday morning, grabbed a Church book and exclaimed, “I need to feed my spirit!”

Blake, we are thrilled with you and others who are choosing to feed their spirits by feasting on the truths of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. And we delight in knowing that many are receiving the power of God in their lives as they worship and serve in the temple.

As many of you know, our family experienced a tender separation three months ago when our daughter Wendy departed from this mortal life. In the final days of her battle with cancer, I was blessed with the opportunity to have our farewell daddy-daughter conversation.

I held her hands and told her how much I loved her and how grateful I was to be her father. I said: “You married in the temple and faithfully honored your covenants. You and your husband welcomed seven children into your home and raised them to be devout disciples of Jesus Christ, valiant Church members, and contributing citizens. And they have chosen spouses of that same caliber. Your daddy is very, very proud of you. You have brought me much joy!”

She quietly responded, “Thank you, Daddy.”

It was a tender, tearful moment for us. During her 67 years, we worked together, sang together, and often skied together. But that evening, we talked of things that matter most, such as covenants, ordinances, obedience, faith, family, fidelity, love, and eternal life.

We miss our daughter greatly. However, because of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, we do not worry about her. As we continue to honor our covenants with God, we live in anticipation of our being with her again. Meanwhile, we're serving the Lord here and she is serving Him there—in paradise.¹

Actually, my wife and I visited Paradise earlier this year—Paradise, California, that is. As it happened, our scheduled visit there came less than 40 hours after our daughter departed from this world. We, along with Elder Kevin W. Pearson and his wife, June, were bolstered by the Saints of the Chico California Stake. We learned of their great faith, their ministering, and the miracles that occurred even amidst their devastating losses from the most destructive wildfire in the history of California.

While there, we spoke at length with a young police officer, John, who was one of many brave first responders. He recalled the thick darkness that descended upon Paradise on November 8, 2018, as flames and embers raced through the town, devouring property and possessions like a scourge and leaving nothing but piles of ash and stark brick chimneys.

For 15 hours, John drove through an impenetrable darkness that was streaked with javelins of threatening embers as he helped person after person, family after family escape to safety—all at the peril of his own life. Yet during that strenuous ordeal, what terrified John most was his all-consuming question: "*Where is my family?*" After many long, terrifying hours of anguish, he finally learned of their safe evacuation.

The account of John's concern for his family has prompted me to speak today with those of you who may ask when approaching the end of your mortal life, "*Where is my family?*" In that coming day when you will complete your mortal probation and enter the spirit world, you will be brought face-to-face with that heart-wrenching question: "*Where is my family?*"

Jesus Christ teaches the way back to our eternal home. He understands our Heavenly Father's plan of eternal progression better than any of us. After all, He is the keystone of it all. He is our Redeemer, our Healer, and our Savior.

Ever since Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, Jesus the Christ has offered His mighty arm to help all who choose to follow Him. Repeatedly, scriptures record that despite all kinds of sins from all kinds of people, His arms are outstretched still.²

The spirit in each of us naturally yearns for family love to last forever. Love songs perpetuate a false hope that love is all you need if you want to be together forever. And some erroneously believe that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ provides a promise that all people will be with their loved ones after death.

In truth, the Savior Himself has made it abundantly clear that while His Resurrection assures that every person who ever lived will indeed be resurrected and live forever,³ much more is required if we want to have the high privilege of exaltation. Salvation is an individual matter, but exaltation is a family matter.

Listen to these words spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ to His prophet: "All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations, that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise ... are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection from the dead; for all contracts that are not made unto this end have an end when men are dead."⁴

So, what is required for a family to be exalted forever? We qualify for *that* privilege by making covenants with God, keeping those covenants, and receiving essential ordinances.

This has been true since the beginning of time. Adam and Eve, Noah and his wife, Abraham and Sarah, Lehi and Sariah, and all other devoted disciples of Jesus Christ—since the world was created—have made the *same* covenants with God. They have received the *same* ordinances that we as members of the Lord's restored Church today have made: those covenants that we receive at baptism and in the temple.

The Savior invites all to follow Him into the waters of baptism and, in time, to make additional covenants with God in the temple and receive and be faithful to those further essential ordinances. All these are required if we want to be exalted with our families and with God forever.

The anguish of my heart is that many people whom I love, whom I admire, and whom I respect decline His invitation. They ignore the pleadings of Jesus Christ when He beckons, "Come, follow me."⁵

I understand why God weeps.⁶ I also weep for such friends and relatives. They are wonderful men and women, devoted to their family and civic responsibilities. They give generously of their time, energy, and resources. And the world is better for their efforts. But they have chosen *not* to make covenants with God. They have not received the ordinances that will exalt them with their families and bind them together forever.⁷

How I wish I could visit with them and invite them to consider seriously the enabling laws of the Lord. I've wondered what I could possibly say so they would feel how much the Savior loves them and know how much I love them and come to recognize how covenant-keeping women and men can receive a "fulness of joy."⁸

They need to understand that while there *is* a place for them hereafter—with wonderful men and women who also chose *not* to make covenants with God—that is *not* the place where families will be reunited and be given the privilege to live and progress forever. That is *not* the kingdom where they will experience the fulness of joy—of never-ending progression and happiness.⁹ Those consummate blessings can come only by living in an exalted celestial realm with God, our Eternal Father; His Son, Jesus Christ; and our wonderful, worthy, and qualified family members.

I feel to say to my reticent friends:

"In this life, you have never settled for second best in anything. Yet, as you resist fully embracing the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, you are choosing to settle for second best.

"The Savior said, 'In my Father's house are many mansions.'¹⁰ However, as you choose *not* to make covenants with God, you are settling for a most meager roof over your head throughout all eternity."

I would further entreat my reticent friends by saying:

"Pour out your heart to God. Ask Him if these things are true. Make time to study His words. Really study! If you truly love your family and if you desire to be exalted with them throughout eternity, pay the price now—through serious study and fervent prayer—to know these eternal truths and then to abide by them.

"If you are not sure you even believe in God, start there. Understand that in the absence of experiences with God, one can doubt the existence of God. So, put yourself in a position to begin

having experiences with Him. Humble yourself. Pray to have eyes to see God's hand in your life and in the world around you. Ask Him to tell you if He is really there—if He knows you. Ask Him how He feels about you. And then listen.”

One such dear friend of mine had limited experiences with God. But he longed to be with his departed wife. So he asked me to help him. I encouraged him to meet with our missionaries in order to understand the doctrine of Christ and learn of gospel covenants, ordinances, and blessings.

That he did. But he felt the course they advised would require him to make too many changes in his life. He said, “Those commandments and covenants are just too difficult for me. Also, I can't possibly pay tithing, and I don't have time to serve in the Church.” Then he asked me, “Once I die, please do the necessary temple work for my wife and me so that we can be together again.”

Thankfully, I am not this man's judge. But I do question the efficacy of proxy temple work for a man who had the opportunity to be baptized in this life—to be ordained to the priesthood and receive temple blessings while here in mortality—but who made the conscious decision to reject that course.

My dear brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ invites us to take the covenant path back home to our Heavenly Parents and be with those we love. He invites us to “come, follow me.”

Now, as President of His Church, I plead with you who have distanced yourselves from the Church and with you who have not yet really sought to know that the Savior's Church has been restored. Do the spiritual work to find out for yourselves, and please do it now. Time is running out.

I testify that God lives! Jesus is the Christ. His Church and the fulness of His gospel have been restored to bless our lives with joy, here and hereafter. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.