

### President Faust

Elder Quentin L. Cook of the Seventy has just spoken to us.

Elder Henry B. Eyring of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will be our next speaker.

## Elder Henry B. Eyring

### Faithful home teachers and visiting teachers

The Latter-day Saints are a covenant people. From the day of baptism through the spiritual milestones of our lives, we make promises with God and He makes promises with us. He always keeps His promises offered through His authorized servants, but it is the crucial test of our lives to see if we will make and keep our covenants with Him.

I saw again the power of keeping covenants through a chance conversation with a man I sat down next to on a trip. I had never met him before, but apparently he had seen me in the crowd because his first words after I introduced myself were, "I've been watching you." He told me about his work. I told him about mine. He asked about my family, and then he told me something about his. He said that his wife was a member of the Church and that he was not.

After he came to trust me, he said something like this: "You know, there is something in your church you should fix. You need to tell your people when to quit." He explained that he and his wife had been married for 25 years. She had been a member of the Church since childhood. In their years of marriage she had only once stepped into a building of the Church, and that was to tour a temple before its dedication, and then only because her parents had arranged it.

Then he told me why he thought we ought to make a change. He said that in those 25 years of married life, in which his wife showed no interest in the Church,

visiting teachers and home teachers had never stopped coming to their home. He told of one evening when he went out to walk his dog alone only to find the home teacher happening by with his dog, eager to visit with him.

He told, with a touch of exasperation, of another night when he came home from a long business trip, put his car in the garage, and then came out to find his home teachers standing there, smiling. He said to me something like, "And there they were, right in my face with another plate of cookies."

I think I understood his feelings. And then I tried, as best I could, to tell him how hard it would be to teach such teachers to quit. I told him that the love that he had felt from those many visitors and their constancy over the years in the face of little response came from a covenant they had made with God. I told him about the baptismal covenant as Alma described it in the Book of Mormon. I didn't quote these words, but you will remember them as Alma asked those he had taught whether they wished to be baptized:

"And it came to pass that he said unto them: Behold, here are the waters of Mormon (for thus were they called) and now, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light;

"Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye

may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life" (Mosiah 18:8-9).

### **Our covenant to witness and to love**

Those home teachers and visiting teachers understood and believed that the covenant to be a witness and to love were intertwined and that they reinforced each other. There is no other way to explain what had happened. My new friend recognized that the visitors had genuine concern for him and for his wife. And he knew their caring sprang from a belief that impelled them to come back. He seemed, at least to me, to understand that those visitors were driven from within by a covenant they would not break.

As we parted, I think he knew why he could expect that there would be more visits, more evidence of caring, and more patient waiting for the opportunity to bear testimony of the restored gospel. As we parted, I realized that I had learned something too. I will never again see home teaching or visiting teaching as only programs of the Church. Those faithful teachers saw what they were doing for what it really was. Such work is an opportunity, not a burden. Every member has made the covenant in the waters of baptism to be a witness for God. Every member has made a covenant to do works of kindness as the Savior would do. So any call to bear witness and to care for others is not a request for extra service; it is a blessing designed by a loving Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ. They have provided such calls as well as other settings, sometimes without a formal call, all for the same purpose. Each is a chance to prove what blessings flow from being a covenant people, and each is an opportunity for which you agreed to be accountable. Each is a sacred responsibility for others accepted in the waters of baptism but

too often not met because it may not be recognized for what it is.

### **Keep covenants in families**

The power of that covenant to love and to witness should transform what members do in other settings across the world. One of the most important is in the family. Prophets in our time have consolidated our meetings on Sunday to allow time for families to be together. The prophets have also been inspired to help us reserve Monday night for family home evenings. Those opportunities require choices. In thousands of homes the choices made are guided by the covenant to comfort those that stand in need of comfort and to stand as witnesses of God.

Both the consolidation of the Sunday meetings and the creation of a family home evening are to provide opportunity for families to have time together to give Christlike service and to study the scriptures and gospel principles. The power of that possibility was taught by President Spencer W. Kimball this way:

"I wonder what this world would be like if every father and mother gathered their children around them at least once a week, explained the gospel, and bore fervent testimonies to them. How could immorality continue and infidelity break families and delinquency spawn?" (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball [1982], 345).

There are in those hours on Sunday and in a family home evening on Monday the opportunity to combine genuine caring, teaching the gospel, and the bearing of testimony. Across the earth there are families who love and understand their covenants who do that. From my front window I have seen parents, their children at their sides, move down the street to the home of a neighbor to offer comfort, to give Christlike service. I wasn't there to see it, but surely the warmth of those moments lingered later at home

when a song of Zion was sung, a prayer given that likely included a plea for the person visited, a scripture read, a short lesson taught, and testimonies of the restored gospel borne.

There is a caution I would give and a promise I would offer about such choices of how to use family time. For a person not yet a member of the Church, to fail to provide such moments of love and faith is simply a lost opportunity. But for those under covenant, it is much more. There are few places where the covenant to love and to bear witness is more easily kept than in the home. And there are few places where it can matter more for those for whom we are accountable. For members of the Church, my caution is that to neglect those opportunities is a choice not to keep sacred covenants.

Because God always honors covenants, I can make a promise to those who in faith keep the covenant to create experiences of giving love and bearing testimony with their families. They will reap a harvest of hearts touched, faith in Jesus Christ exercised unto repentance, and the desire and the power to keep covenants strengthened.

### **Keep covenants by sharing the gospel**

There is another circumstance in which the covenant to combine kindness with bearing witness has great power to change lives. Thousands of times every day, members of the Church are watched, as I was by the man I met on a trip, by people curious to know something about our lives. Because we are under covenant to be witnesses, we will try to tell them how the gospel has brought us happiness. What they think of what we say may depend largely on how much they sense we care for them.

That was true when King Lamoni met Ammon, as we have it described in the Book of Mormon. Ammon had been captured by guards and brought to the king, who could take his life. But appar-

ently within minutes King Lamoni recognized that Ammon cared enough for him to want to serve him. Ammon said, when offered high station, "Nay, but I will be thy servant" (Alma 17:25; see also verses 20-24). Within days the king knew that Ammon was willing to risk his life for him. And then came the opportunity for Ammon to be a witness of God to the king.

Those we meet will feel the love that springs from our long practice in keeping a covenant to "mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort" (Mosiah 18:9). It may not be in hours or days as it was for King Lamoni, but they will feel our love after testing our hearts. And when they find our concern sincere, the Holy Spirit can more easily touch them to allow us to teach and to testify, as it did for Ammon.

Again I have a caution and a promise. The caution is that sorrow will come from failure either to love or to bear witness. If we fail to feel and show honest concern for those we approach with the gospel, they will reasonably distrust our message. But if out of fear of rejection we fail to tell them what the gospel has meant in our lives and could mean in theirs, we will someday share their sorrow. Either in this life or in the life to come, they will know that we failed to share with them the priceless gift of the gospel. They will know that accepting the gospel was the only way for them to inherit eternal life. And they will know that we received the gospel with a promise that we would share it.

I can make two promises to those who offer the gospel to others. The first is that even those who reject it will someday thank us. More than once I have asked missionaries to visit friends far from where I lived, learned that the missionaries had been rejected, and then received a letter from my friend with words like this: "I was honored that you would

offer to me something that I knew meant so much to you." If not in this life, such messages will be sent to us in the world to come when those we approached will know the truth and how much we cared for them. My second promise is that as you offer the gospel to others, it will go down more deeply into your own heart. It becomes the well of water springing up into eternal life for us as we offer it to others.

### **Keep covenants by living law of the fast**

There is one other setting which provides a near-perfect opportunity to combine love and testimony. In every ward and branch in the Church, once a month we hold a fast and testimony meeting. We fast for two meals. With the money saved, and adding more to it whenever we can, we pay a generous fast offering. The bishop and the branch president use those offerings, under inspiration, to care for the poor and the needy. Thus, by paying a fast offering we give comfort to those in need of comfort as we promised that we would.

The fast also helps us to feel humble and meek so that the Holy Ghost may more easily be our companion. By our fast, we both keep our covenant to care for others and we prepare to keep our covenant to bear testimony.

Those who have prepared carefully for the fast and testimony meeting won't need to be reminded how to bear testimony should they feel impressed to do it in the meeting. They won't give sermons or exhortations or travel reports or try to entertain as they bear witness. Because they will have already expressed appreciation to people privately, they will have less need to do it publicly. Neither will they feel a need to use eloquent language nor to go on at length.

A testimony is a simple expression of what we feel. The member who has fasted both for the blessing of the poor and for the companionship of the Spirit

will be feeling gratitude for the love of God and the certainty of eternal truth. Even a child can feel such things, which may be why sometimes the testimony of a child so moves us and why our preparation of fasting and prayer produces in us childlike feelings.

That preparation for the fast and testimony meeting is a covenant obligation for members of the Church. The offering of the gospel to those we meet and to our families are covenant obligations. We can take heart that our honest effort to keep our covenants allows God to increase our power to do it. We all need that assurance at times when our promise to love and to witness seems hard for us.

### **Blessings of keeping covenants**

The fruit of keeping covenants is the companionship of the Holy Ghost and an increase in the power to love. That happens because of the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ to change our very natures. We are eyewitnesses of that miracle of greater spiritual power coming to those who accept covenants and keep commandments. For instance, there are families across the Church who read and reread letters from their missionary children with wonder, and a few tears, at the miracle that in so short a time they have become new, better people.

Yet I have also seen that same miracle in a mature man and woman, called to serve as proselyting missionary companions in the most difficult of circumstances which would have taxed the bravest youth. As the husband made his report, I thought back to the man I had known. I realized that the promised miracle of spiritual growth is not a product of youth but of the faith simply to try to keep covenants. That couple went out to love the people and to bear witness, and they returned transformed as much as any 21-year-old.

### God will help us keep covenants

Each of us who has made covenants with God faces challenges unique to us. But each of us shares some common assurances. Our Heavenly Father knows us and our circumstances and even what faces us in the future. His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior, has suffered and paid for our sins and those of all the people we will ever meet. He has perfect understanding of the feelings, the suffering, the trials, and the needs of every individual. Because of that, a way will be prepared for us to keep our covenants, however difficult that may now appear, if we go forward in faith.

I share with you the obligation to be a witness for God at all times and in all places that I will be in as long as I live. And I share with you the confidence that God can grant us the power to keep all our covenants.

I am grateful that I know as surely as did the Apostles Peter, James, and John that Jesus is the Christ, our risen Lord, and that he is our advocate with the Father. I know that the Father bore di-

rect witness of His Beloved Son by introducing the resurrected Lord to the boy Joseph Smith in the Sacred Grove. I know that the Book of Mormon is the word of God, translated by the Prophet Joseph through the power of God. I know that the keys of the Melchizedek Priesthood were restored by those who received them from the Savior and that President Gordon B. Hinckley is now the only person on earth authorized to direct the use of all those keys. I bear solemn testimony that this is the true Church of Jesus Christ, in which the ordinances and the covenants are offered, which if accepted and honored produce peace in this life and assure us eternal life in the world to come. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### President Faust

We have just heard from Elder Henry B. Eyring of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Elder Russell M. Nelson, also of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, will be our concluding speaker for this session.

## Elder Russell M. Nelson

Humbly I join the Book of Mormon prophet Jacob, who asked, "Why not speak of the atonement of Christ?"<sup>1</sup> This topic comprises our third article of faith: "We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel."

Before we can comprehend the Atonement of Christ, however, we must first understand the Fall of Adam. And before we can understand the Fall of Adam, we must first understand the Creation. These three crucial components of the plan of salvation relate to each other.<sup>2</sup>

### The Creation

The Creation culminated with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They were created in the image of God, with bodies of flesh and bone.<sup>3</sup> Created in the image of God and not yet mortal, they could not grow old and die.<sup>4</sup> "And they would have had no children"<sup>5</sup> nor experienced the trials of life. (Please forgive me for mentioning children and the trials of life in the same breath.) The creation of Adam and Eve was a *paradisiacal creation*, one that required a significant change before they could fulfill the commandment to have children<sup>6</sup> and thus