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The music for this session will be provided by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg, with Linda Margetts and Bonnie Goodliffe at the organ.

The choir will open these services by singing "They, the Builders of the Nation." The invocation will then be offered by Elder Charles Didier of the Presidency of the Seventy, following which the choir will sing "The Lord Is My Shepherd."

President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, will then address us. He will be followed by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, also of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and Elder Spencer E. Jones of the Seventy.

The choir sang "They, the Builders of the Nation."

Elder Charles Didier offered the invocation.

The choir sang "The Lord Is My Shepherd."

President Boyd K. Packer

What grandparents do

Years ago on Christmas Eve, a cousin lost a little five-year-old boy to quick-pneumonia. The family gathered around the casket for the family prayer. A small blanket, made by his mother, lay folded across the little boy's feet.

Just as they were to close the casket, my mother stepped forward, put her arm around the grieving mother, and helped her unfold the blanket and tuck it around the little boy. The last his parents saw of their little son, he was asleep, covered with that favorite blanket. It was a very tender moment. That is what grandmothers do!

We returned to Brigham City for the funeral of my wife's father, William W. Smith. A young man I knew as a seminary student stood at the casket, deeply moved. I did not know that he knew my father-in-law. He said:

"One summer I worked for him on the farm. Brother Smith talked to me about going on a mission. My family could not possibly support a missionary. Brother Smith told me to pray about it and said, 'If you decide to go on a mission, I will pay for your mission,' and he did."

Neither my wife nor her mother knew that. It was one of those things that grandfathers do.

We have 10 children. One unsettled Sunday morning when our family was young, my wife was in sacrament meeting. As usual, I was away on Sunday. Our children took up much of a row.

Sister Walker, a lovely, gray-haired grandmother who raised 12 children, quietly moved from several rows back and slid into the row among our restless children. After the meeting, my wife thanked her for the help.

Sister Walker said, "You have your hands full, don't you?" My wife nodded. Sister Walker then patted her on the hand and said, "Your hands full now; your heart full later!" How prophetic was her quiet comment. That is what grandmothers do!

We presided over the New England Mission. One of our missionaries married and had five children. He went away to get a larger car for his family and never returned. His body was later found under an overpass; his car had been stolen.

I called his stake president to offer help to the family. He had already offered.

The grandfather said, “We know what our duty is. We won’t need any help from the Church. We know what our duty is.” That is what grandfathers do!

The elderly—a priceless resource

It is my purpose to speak to you about and to speak to grandparents—the grandpas and the grandmas—and to other elderly members who have no children of their own but who stand in as grandparents.

The scriptures tell us, “With the ancient is wisdom; and in length of days understanding” (Job 12:12).

Once in a stake meeting, I noticed a larger than usual number of older members, most of them widows. I mentioned to the stake president how impressive they were.

The president replied, “Yes, but they are not active in the Church,” meaning they did not serve as leaders or teachers. He spoke as though they were a burden.

I repeated his words, “Not active in the Church?” and asked, “Are they active in the gospel?” He did not quite understand the difference at first.

Like many of us, he concentrated so much on what people *do* that he overlooked what they *are*—a priceless resource of experience, wisdom, and inspiration.

Youth should draw close to the elderly

We face an ominous challenge. Populations worldwide are declining. The birth-rate in most countries is falling and life expectancy increasing. Families are smaller—deliberately limited. In some countries, in just a few years there will be more grandparents than there are children. The aging of the population has far-reaching consequences economically, socially, and spiritually. It will affect the growth of the Church.

We must teach our youth to draw close to the elderly grandpas and grandmas.

The First Presidency recently instructed young women who are approaching womanhood to join the mothers and grandmothers in Relief Society (see First Presidency letter, 19 Mar. 2003).

Some young women draw away. They would rather be with those their own age.

Young women, do not be so very foolish as to miss this association with the older sisters. They will bring more worth into your life than much of the activity you enjoy so much.

Leaders, teach the girls to draw close to their mothers and grandmothers and to the older women in the Relief Society. They will then have an association similar to what the young men have in the priesthood quorums.

The Restoration ties generations together

All the attention given to our youth—all the programs, all we do for them—will be incomplete unless we teach them the purpose of the Restoration. The keys of the priesthood were restored and the sealing authority revealed and temples built to tie the generations together. From ancient times through all the revelations runs that eternal, golden thread, “Turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers” (Malachi 4:6).

Use the resource of the elderly

Bishop, do you realize that some problems you worry about so much with the youth, and with others, could be solved if they would stay close to their fathers and mothers and to their grandparents, to the older folks?

If you are burdened with overmuch counseling, there are older sisters, grandmas in the ward, who can influence young married women and act as a grandmother to them. And there are older grandfathers for the young men. Older people have a

steadiness, a serenity that comes from experience. Learn to use that resource.

The Prophet Joseph Smith said, “The way to get along in any important matter is to gather unto yourselves wise men [and women], experienced and aged men [and women], to assist in council in all times of trouble” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 299).

We try to gather young people, and we miss getting the generations together. There is so much that older members can do. If you see older members as inactive in the Church, ask yourself, “Are they active in the gospel?”

Prayers of parents and grandparents

Do not overlook the great sustaining power in the prayers of the parents and the grandparents. Remember, the “fervent prayer of a righteous man [or woman] avail-eth much” (James 5:16).

Alma the Younger was a rebel. He was struck down by an angel who told him, “Behold, the Lord hath heard the prayers of his people, and also the prayers of his servant, Alma, who is thy father; for he has prayed with much faith concerning thee that thou mightest be brought to the knowledge of the truth; therefore, for this purpose have I come to convince thee of the power and authority of God, that the prayers of his servants might be answered according to their faith” (Mosiah 27:14).

Blessings of caring for the elderly

My wife and I have seen our grandparents and then our parents leave us. Some experiences that we first thought to be burdens or trouble have long since been reclassified as blessings.

My wife’s father died in our home. He needed constant care. Nurses taught our children how to care for our bedridden grandpa. What they learned is of great

worth to them and to us. How grateful we are to have had him close to us.

We were repaid a thousand times over by the influence he had on our children. That was a great experience for our children, one I learned as a boy when Grandpa Packer died in our home.

Value the old folks for what they *are*, not just what they can *do*.

Pattern in the Church’s presiding councils

Have you ever wondered why the Lord organized the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles so the senior leadership of the Church will always be older men? This pattern of seniority values wisdom and experience over youth and physical vigor.

The average age of the Presidency and the Twelve at the present time is 77 years old. We are not very nimble. We may be past our prime. Nevertheless, the Lord ordered it to be this way.

A conference or two ago, Joseph Wirthlin said he was going to challenge the members of the Twelve to a race. I thought once, “Well, I’ll accept the challenge.” Then I thought it would be safer to race against 96-year-old Brother David Haight. I thought that over and decided that David might trip me with his cane, and I would lose the race. So I gave it up!

When the Presidency and the Twelve meet together, we combine 1,161 years of life with an astonishing variety of experiences. We have 430 years, cumulatively, as General Authorities of the Church. Almost anything we talk about, one or more of us has been there, done that—including military action!

Seek help and advice from the elderly

We live in troubled times. In the lifetime of our youth, the troubles will never be less and will certainly be more. Old folks offer a sure knowledge that things can be endured.

Our children have married and left home to seek their fortune. One family drove away with an old car and their little children. My wife was in tears. I consoled her, saying, "The Church is where they are going. There will be a grandma there to answer her questions about cooking or nursing and a grandpa to teach him practical things."

An adopted grandma can be found in Relief Society. And a grandpa will be found in the quorums of the priesthood. But not all of the grandpas and grandmas are in the Church.

One son bought a small home in a distant state. He showed me bricks on a corner of the foundation that were eroding away. He asked what he should do.

I did not know, but I asked, "Is there an older couple that lives close to you?"

"Yes," he said, "across the street and down a few houses is a retired couple."

"Why don't you ask him to come over and look at that. He knows your climate."

That was done, and he got the advice of an older man who had seen problems like that and many others. That is what *adopted* grandpas can do.

"Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" (Exodus 20:12).

The Apostle Paul taught that "aged women" must teach young women and "aged men" must exhort young men, "shewing thyself a pattern of good works" (see Titus 2:1-7).

Do not withdraw during the golden years

We are old now, and in due time we will be summoned beyond the veil. We do not resist that. We try to teach the practical things we have learned over the years to those who are younger—to our family and to others.

We cannot *do* what we once did, but we have become more than ever we were

before. Life's lessons, some of them very painful, qualify us to counsel, to correct, and even to warn our youth.

In your golden years there is so much to *do* and so much to *be*. Do not withdraw into a retirement from life, into amusement. That, for some, would be useless, even selfish. You may have served a mission and been released and consider yourself as having completed your service in the Church, but you are never released from being active in the *gospel*. "If," the Lord said, "ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the work" (D&C 4:3).

You may at last, when old and feeble, learn that the greatest mission of all is to strengthen your own family and the families of others, to seal the generations.

Warm others by the fire of your faith

Now, I am teaching a true principle. I am teaching doctrine. It is written that "the principle [agrees] precisely with the doctrine which is commanded you in the revelation" (D&C 128:7).

In the hymn "How Firm a Foundation," which was published in 1835 in the first Latter-day Saint hymnbook, we find these words:

E'en down to old age, all my people
shall prove
My sov'reign, eternal, unchangeable
love;
And then, when gray hair shall their
temples adorn, . . .
Like lambs shall they still in my bosom
be borne.
[*Hymns*, no. 85]

Keep the fire of your testimony of the restored gospel and your witness of our Redeemer burning so brightly that our children can warm their hands by the fire of your faith. That is what grandfathers and grandmothers are to do! In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.