

## Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

### **Dedicated servants of the Lord**

In earlier years the Brethren often reported their missions in general conference. I realize this is 2004, not 1904, but I wish to invoke the spirit of that earlier practice and reflect on some of the wonderful things Sister Holland and I are experiencing in Latin America. In doing so I hope to make general application to all of you, wherever you may live or serve.

First of all I would like to thank every missionary who has ever labored in this transcendent latter-day undertaking we have been given. The rolling forth of the restored gospel is a miracle in every sense of the word, and not the least of the miracle is that a significant portion of it rolls forward on the shoulders of 19-year-olds! As we have seen your sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters (and in some cases your parents and grandparents!) faithfully laboring in Chile, I have pictured the tens of thousands of others like them we have met all over the world. Clean, clear, bright-eyed missionaries, laboring two-by-two, have become a living symbol of this Church everywhere. They themselves are the first gospel message their investigators encounter—and what a message that is. Everyone knows who they are, and those of us who know them the best love them the most.

### **Sacrifices of missionaries**

I wish you could meet the sister called to serve with us from her native Argentina. Wanting to do everything possible to finance her own mission, she sold her violin, her most prized and nearly sole earthly possession. She said simply, “God will bless me with another violin after I have blessed His children with the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

I wish you could meet the Chilean elder who, living without family in a boarding school, happened upon a Book of Mormon

and started reading it that very evening. Reminiscent of Parley P. Pratt’s experience, he read insatiably—nonstop through the night. With the breaking of day, he was overwhelmed with a profound sense of peace and a new spirit of hope. He determined to find out where this book had come from and who had written its marvelous pages. Thirteen months later he was on a mission.

I wish you could meet the marvelous young man who came to us from Bolivia, arriving with no matching clothing and shoes three sizes too large for him. He was a little older because he was the sole breadwinner in his home, and it had taken some time to earn money for his mission. He raised chickens and sold the eggs door-to-door. Then, just as his call finally came, his widowed mother faced an emergency appendectomy. Our young friend gave every cent of the money he had earned for his mission to pay for his mother’s surgery and postoperative care, then quietly rounded up what used clothing he could from his friends and arrived at the MTC in Santiago on schedule. I can assure you that his clothes now match, his shoes now fit, and both he and his mother are safe and sound, temporally as well as spiritually.

And so they come, from your homes all over the world. Included in such a long list of dedicated servants of the Lord is an increasing number of senior couples who make an indispensable contribution to the work. How we love and need couples in virtually every mission of this Church! Those of you who can, put away your golf clubs, don’t worry about the stock market, realize that your grandchildren will still be your grandchildren when you return—and go! We promise you the experience of a lifetime.

### **Faithfulness of Church members**

Let me say something of the marvelous members of the Church themselves. In the

reorganization of a rather far-flung stake recently, I felt the Lord's prompting to call a man to the stake presidency who, I had been told, owned a bicycle but no automobile. Many leaders across the Church don't have cars, but I was nevertheless worried about what that might mean for this man in this particular stake. In my terminally ill Spanish I pursued the interview, then said, "*Hermano, ¿no tiene un auto?*" With a smile and not a second's hesitation he replied, "*No tengo un auto; pero yo tengo pies, yo tengo fe.*" ("I do not have a car, but I do have feet and I do have faith.") He then said he could ride the bus, ride his bicycle, or walk, "*como los misioneros,*" he smiled—"like the missionaries." And so he does.

Just eight weeks ago I was holding a mission district conference on the island of Chiloé, an interior location in the south of Chile that gets few visitors. Imagine the responsibility I felt in addressing these beautiful people when it was pointed out to me that a very elderly man seated near the front of the chapel had set out on foot at five o'clock that morning, walking for four hours to be in his seat by nine o'clock for a meeting that was not scheduled to begin until eleven o'clock. He said he wanted to get a good seat. I looked into his eyes, thought of times in my life when I had been either too casual or too late, and thought of Jesus's phrase, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."<sup>1</sup>

### **Sacrifices to go to the temple**

The Punta Arenas Chile Stake is the Church's southernmost stake anywhere on this planet, its outermost borders stretching toward Antarctica. Any stake farther south would have to be staffed by penguins. For the Punta Arenas Saints it is a 4,200-mile round-trip bus ride to the Santiago temple. For a husband and wife it can take up to 20 percent of an annual local income just for the transportation alone. Only 50 people can be accommodated on the bus, but for every excursion

250 others come out to hold a brief service with them the morning of their departure.

Pause for a minute and ask yourself when was the last time you stood on a cold, windswept parking lot adjacent to the Strait of Magellan just to sing with, pray for, and cheer on their way those who were going to the temple, hoping your savings would allow you to go next time? One hundred ten hours, 70 of those on dusty, bumpy, unfinished roads looping through Argentina's wild Patagonia. What does 110 hours on a bus feel like? I honestly don't know, but I do know that some of us get nervous if we live more than 110 miles from a temple or if the services there take more than 110 minutes. While we are teaching the principle of tithing to, praying with, and building ever more temples for just such distant Latter-day Saints, perhaps the rest of us can do more to enjoy the blessings and wonder of the temple regularly when so many temples are increasingly within our reach.

### **"Abide in me"**

And that leads me to my final point. For the Church at large, we have so many things to associate in our minds with the visionary ministry of President Gordon B. Hinckley, including (perhaps especially) the vast expansion of temples and temple building. But I dare say for those of us on this rostrum, it is likely that we will remember him at least as emphatically for his determination to retain in permanent activity the converts who join this Church. No modern prophet has addressed this issue more directly nor expected more from us in seeing that it happen. With a twinkle in his eye and a hand smacking the table in front of him, he said to the Twelve recently, "Brethren, when my life is finished and the final services are concluding, I am going to rise up as I go by, look each of you in the eye, and say, 'How are we doing on retention?'"

This subject brings us full circle, linking the kind of true, deep conversion the missionaries are striving to bring with the greater commitment and devotion being seen in wonderful members all over the Church.

Christ said, “I am the true vine, and . . . ye are the branches.”<sup>2</sup> “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.”<sup>3</sup>

“Abide in me” is an understandable and beautiful enough concept in the elegant English of the King James Bible, but *abide* is not a word we use much anymore. So I gained even more appreciation for this admonition from the Lord when I was introduced to the translation of this passage in another language. In Spanish that familiar phrase is rendered *permaneced en mi*. Like the English verb *abide*, *permanecer* means “to remain, to stay,” but even gringos like me can hear the root cognate there of “permanence.” The sense of this, then, is “stay—but stay forever.” That is the call of the gospel message to Chileans and everyone else in the world. Come, but come to remain. Come with conviction and endurance. Come permanently, for your sake and the sake of all the generations who must follow you, and we will help each other be strong to the very end.

### Stay aboard the Good Ship Zion

“He who picks up one end of the stick picks up the other,” my marvelous mission president taught in his very first message to us.<sup>4</sup> And that is the way it is supposed to be when we join this, the true and living Church of the true and living God. When we join The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we board the Good Ship Zion and sail with her wherever she goes until she comes into that millennial port. *We stay in the boat*, through squalls and stills, through storms and sunburn, because that is the only way to the promised

land. This Church is the Lord’s vehicle for crucial doctrines, ordinances, covenants, and keys that are essential to exaltation, and one cannot be fully faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ without striving to be faithful in the Church, which is its earthly institutional manifestation. To new convert and longtime member alike, we declare in the spirit of Nephi’s powerful valedictory exhortation:

“Ye have entered in by the gate; . . . [but] now, . . . after ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; . . . press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, . . . and endure to the end, behold, thus . . . ye shall have eternal life.”<sup>5</sup>

Jesus said, “Without me ye can do nothing.”<sup>6</sup> I testify that that is God’s truth. Christ is everything to us, and we are to “abide” in Him permanently, unyieldingly, steadfastly, forever. For the fruit of the gospel to blossom and bless our lives, we must be firmly attached to Him, the Savior of us all, and to this, His Church, which bears His holy name. He is the vine that is our true source of strength and the only source of eternal life. In Him we not only will endure but also will prevail and triumph in this holy cause that will never fail us. May we never fail it nor fail Him, I pray in the sacred and holy name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### NOTES

1. Matthew 8:10.
2. John 15:1, 5.
3. John 15:4.
4. Marion D. Hanks quoting Harry Emerson Fosdick, *Living under Tension* (1941), 111.
5. 2 Nephi 31:18–20.
6. John 15:5.

### President Faust

The choir and congregation will now sing “Let Us All Press On.” Bishop Keith B. McMullin of the Presiding Bishopric