

Continually Holding Fast

By Elder Kevin S. Hamilton
Of the Seventy



May we continually hold fast to the iron rod that leads to the presence of our Heavenly Father.

My father could remember the very day, even the very hour, that his family—father, mother, and four children—left the Church, many never to return again in this life. He was 13 years old, a deacon, and in those days families attended Sunday School in the morning and then sacrament meeting in the afternoon. On a beautiful spring day, after returning home from Sunday morning worship services and having a midday family meal together, his mother turned to his father and asked simply, “Well, dear, do you think we should go to sacrament meeting this afternoon, or should we take the family for a ride in the country?”

The idea that there was an option to sacrament meeting had never occurred to my father, but he and his three teenage siblings all sat up and paid careful attention. That Sunday afternoon ride in the country was probably an enjoyable family activity, but that small decision became the start of a new direction which ultimately led his family away from the Church with its safety, security, and blessings and onto a different path.

As a lesson to those of our day who might be tempted to choose a different path, the Book of Mormon prophet Lehi shared a vision with his family where he “saw numberless concourses of people, many of whom were pressing forward, that they might obtain the path which led unto the tree by which [he] stood.

“And ... they did come forth, and commence in the path which led to the tree.

“And ... there arose a mist of darkness; ... insomuch that they who had commenced in the path did lose their way, that they wandered off and were lost.”¹

Lehi then saw a second group that was “pressing forward, and they came forth and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press forward through the mist of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron, even until they did come forth and partake of the fruit of the tree.” Unfortunately, “after they had partaken of the fruit of the tree they did cast their eyes about as if they were ashamed” because of those in “a great and spacious building” that “were in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who had come ... and were partaking of the fruit.” These people then “fell away into forbidden paths and were lost.”² They were unable, or perhaps unwilling, to endure to the end.

There was, however, a third group that was not only successful in reaching the tree of life, but they afterward did not fall away. Of these, the scriptures say that they pressed “forward, *continually holding fast* to the rod of iron, until they came forth and fell down and partook of the fruit of the tree.”³ The rod of iron represented for this group of people the only safety and security that they could find, and they held fast continually; they refused to

let go, even for something as simple as a Sunday afternoon ride in the country.

About this group of people, Elder David A. Bednar has taught: “The key phrase in this verse is ‘continually holding fast’ to the rod of iron. ... Perhaps this third group of people *consistently* read *and* studied *and* searched the words of Christ. ... This is the group you and I should strive to join.”⁴

Those of us who are members of God’s Church today have made covenants to follow Jesus Christ and to obey God’s commandments. At baptism we covenanted to stand as a witness of the Savior,⁵ to succor the weak and the needy,⁶ to keep the commandments of God, and to repent as needed, for as the Apostle Paul taught, “All have sinned, and [fall] short of the glory of God.”⁷

Each week we have the opportunity to attend a sacrament meeting, where we can renew these covenants by partaking of the bread and water of the sacrament ordinance. This simple act allows us to once again pledge ourselves to follow Jesus Christ and to repent when we do fall short. God’s promise to us in return is His Spirit as a guide and protection.

From *Preach My Gospel*, our missionaries teach that revelation and testimony come when we attend our Sunday Church meetings: “As we attend Church services and worship together, we strengthen each other. We are renewed by our association with friends and family. Our faith is strengthened as we study the scriptures and learn more about the restored gospel.”⁸

One might ask why we have three separate meetings on Sunday and why the need for each. Let’s briefly look at these three meetings:

1. •Sacrament meeting provides the opportunity to participate in the ordinance of the sacrament. We renew our covenants, receive an increased measure of the Spirit, and have the additional blessing of being instructed and edified by the Holy Ghost.
2. •Sunday School allows us to “teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom,”⁹ that all might be “edified and rejoice together.”¹⁰ Great power and personal peace come as we understand the doctrines of the restored gospel.
3. •Priesthood meetings are a time for men and young men to “learn [their] duty”¹¹ and to “be instructed more perfectly,”¹² and Relief Society meetings provide the women of the Church an opportunity to “increase their faith ... , strengthen [their] families and homes, and help those in need.”¹³

Likewise, our young women and children have their own meetings and classes where they are taught the gospel as they prepare for important responsibilities that will come to them. In each of these unique but connected meetings, we learn the doctrine, feel the Spirit, and serve one another. While there may be exceptions due to distance, travel cost, or health, we should strive to attend all of our Sunday meetings. I promise that blessings of great joy and peace will come from worship during our three-hour Sunday meeting schedule.

Our family has committed to attend all of our Sunday meetings. We have found that this strengthens our faith and deepens our understanding of the gospel. We have learned that we feel good about our decision to attend our Church meetings, especially as we return to our home and continue to observe the Sabbath. We even attend all of our Sunday meetings when we are on vacation or traveling. One of our daughters recently wrote to say that she had attended church in a city where she was traveling and then added, “Yes, Dad, I did attend all three of the Sunday meetings.” We know that she was blessed for this righteous decision.

We each have many choices to make as to how we observe the Sabbath day. There will always be some “good” activity that can and should be sacrificed for the better choice of Church meeting attendance. This is in fact one of the ways that the adversary “cheateth [our] souls, and leadeth [us carefully] away.”¹⁴ He uses “good” activities as substitutes for “better” or even “best” activities.¹⁵

Continually holding fast to the rod means that whenever possible we attend our Sunday meetings: sacrament meeting, Sunday School, and priesthood or Relief Society meetings. Our children and youth attend their respective meetings in Primary, Young Men, and Young Women. We should never pick or choose which meetings we attend. We simply hold fast to the word of God by worshipping and attending our Sabbath meetings.

Continually holding fast to the rod means that we strive to keep all of God’s commandments, to have daily personal and family prayer, and to study the scriptures daily.

Continually holding fast is part of the doctrine of Christ as taught in the Book of Mormon. We exercise faith in Jesus Christ, repent of our sins, change our hearts, and then follow Him down into the waters of baptism and receive the confirming gift of the Holy Ghost, which serves as a guide and comforter. And then, as Nephi taught, we “press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ” until the very end of our lives.¹⁶

My brothers and sisters, we are a covenant people. We willingly make and keep covenants, and the promised blessing is that we will receive “all that [the] Father hath.”¹⁷ As we continually hold fast to the rod by keeping our covenants, we will be strengthened to resist the temptations and perils of the world. We will be able to navigate this mortal life with all of its challenges until we actually reach the tree with the fruit “most precious and most desirable above all other.”¹⁸

My father was fortunate to marry a good woman who encouraged him to come back to the church of his youth and begin again to progress along the path. Their faithful lives have blessed all of their children, the next generation of grandchildren, and now great-grandchildren.

Just as the simple decision to attend or not attend one of their Sabbath day worship meetings made a significant difference in the lives of my grandparents’ family, our everyday decisions will impact our lives in significant ways. A seemingly small decision such as whether or not to attend a sacrament meeting can have far-reaching, even eternal, consequences.

May we choose to be diligent and gain the great blessings and protections that come from gathering together and keeping covenants. May we continually hold fast to the iron rod that leads to the presence of our Heavenly Father is my prayer in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. 1 Nephi 8:21–23.

2. 1 Nephi 8:24–28.

3. 1 Nephi 8:30; emphasis added.

4. David A. Bednar, “A Reservoir of Living Water” (Church Educational System fireside address, Feb. 4, 2007), 8–9; speeches.byu.edu.

5. See Mosiah 18:9.

6. See Doctrine and Covenants 81:5.

7. Romans 3:23.

8. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2004), 74.

9. Doctrine and Covenants 88:77.

10. Doctrine and Covenants 50:22.

11. Doctrine and Covenants 107:99.

12. Doctrine and Covenants 88:78.

13. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 9.1.1.

14. 2 Nephi 28:21.

15. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Good, Better, Best,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2007, 104–8.

16. 2 Nephi 31:20.

17. Doctrine and Covenants 84:38.

18. 1 Nephi 15:36.

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