



Teachings of the Living Prophets

Teacher Manual

Religion 333

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Religion 333

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Introduction

Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles declared:



“Living prophets are leading this church today. The greatest security of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints comes from learning to listen to and obey the words and commandments that the Lord has given through living prophets. I would hope that the world would understand the importance of having a living prophet on earth today” (Robert D. Hales, “Hear the Prophet’s Voice and Obey,” *Ensign*, May 1995, 17).

As the teacher for this course, you have the opportunity of helping your students recognize the blessing of living in a day when living prophets are upon the earth. You can help them know that Heavenly Father speaks today as He has in all dispensations. When the living prophets speak in an authoritative capacity to the members of the Church, what they say is “the mind of the Lord, ... the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation” (D&C 68:4).

Prayerfully study the scriptures and general conference addresses. Seek the Holy Spirit as you choose learning activities that help students grow spiritually. Help students discover, understand, and live the truths presented in the conferences of the Church.

This manual supplements your preparation by providing introductory information to the chapters, identifying scriptures and gospel principles, and suggesting ways you can help students understand the doctrine and apply it in their lives.

How This Manual Is Organized

Religion 333 is designed to be taught in a single semester. This manual contains seven chapters:

1. Our Need for Living Prophets
2. The Living Prophet: The President of the Church
3. Succession in the Presidency
4. The Quorum of the First Presidency
5. The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles
6. General Conference
7. Studying General Conference Addresses

The first six chapters include content and insights that you can use as a resource as you teach the doctrinal foundations for this class. As the teacher you have the flexibility to teach these lessons the first six class periods of the semester or to spread them throughout the semester. Chapter 7 provides ideas on multiple methods for teaching the words of the General Authorities from the most recent conference issue of the *Ensign* or *Liahona* magazine. The remaining class periods should be taught from the conference issue.

The lessons in this manual are designed to last 50 minutes. If your class meets twice a week, each lesson should last approximately 50 minutes. If you meet only once a week, each lesson should last approximately 90 minutes. For a 90-minute class you might teach one of the lessons from this manual as well as material from the *Ensign* or *Liahona*. You will need to adapt the course material to your individual teaching circumstances. During a typical semester, instruction from the *Ensign* or *Liahona* will constitute approximately 75 percent of the classroom time.

Each chapter in this manual has three sections:

- Introduction
- Some Doctrines and Principles
- Ideas for Teaching

Introduction

The “Introduction” section highlights general themes contained in the chapter and will help you gain a quick vision of the overall topic.

Some Doctrines and Principles

The section called “Some Doctrines and Principles” contains a list of central doctrines and principles related to that lesson topic. In addition to the doctrines and principles identified in the manual, you might find other important truths in the scriptures or conference issues of the *Ensign* or *Liahona* that you feel meet the needs of your students. This is your prerogative as the teacher. However, you may want to survey the other chapters in the manual before teaching additional principles. If a principle or doctrine is not addressed in the suggested lesson material, it may be presented in another chapter that supports the topic more completely.

Ideas for Teaching

The “Ideas for Teaching” section provides a specific teaching idea for each of the items identified under “Some Doctrines and Principles.” This section may also contain teaching suggestions for significant ideas not listed under “Some Doctrines and Principles.” These “Ideas for Teaching” help you prepare lesson material and learning activities. Adapt the lesson suggestions to fit the classroom environment, student needs, and time constraints.

Other Teaching Helps

Commentary in the student manual. The *Teachings of the Living Prophets Student Manual* (Religion 333) contains valuable commentary by General Authorities and General Officers of the Church. Several teaching ideas in the teacher manual refer you to the commentary found in the student manual. Encourage students to use this resource both in and outside of class. Furthermore, each chapter of the student manual concludes with a “Points to Ponder” and “Suggested Assignments” section. The questions under “Points to Ponder” and the activities in “Suggested Assignments” help students consider more carefully the supplemental readings. Many of these questions and activities can also be adapted into teaching ideas for use in class.

Words of the living prophets, General Authorities, and General Officers of the Church. As you study current talks given in general conference and articles in Church magazines, look for additional material that could supplement the lessons in this manual.

Seminaries and Institutes of Religion website. Seminaries and Institutes of Religion also has a website, institute.lds.org, with many resources that may help you.

How to Use This Manual

Use the general conference addresses of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles extensively to supplement this manual as you prepare lessons and present information in class. Messages by members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles found in Church magazines, talks given on other occasions, or official communications that are periodically sent out by the Brethren may also be considered.

The manual could be used in several ways, including the following:

1. You may choose to closely follow the teaching suggestions as outlined.
2. You may use this manual as a study guide to identify principles and themes you want to develop in your lesson.

Decide What You Will Teach

Choose doctrines, principles, events, and applications that are most important for your students to know and do. Much of what you teach will come from this manual and the student manual; however, be sure to consider using scriptures to supplement the principles from the manuals. Let the promptings of the Holy Ghost and the needs of your students guide you as you decide what to teach. (For more information on *what* to teach, see *Gospel Teaching and Learning: A Handbook for Teachers and Leaders in Seminaries and Institutes of Religion* [2012], section 4.3.3.)

You are not obligated to teach all of the suggested doctrine and principles in each chapter, and you will likely find that you do not have the time to do so. **Elder Richard G. Scott** (1928–2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles counseled:



“Remember, your highest priority is not to get through all the material if that means that it cannot be properly absorbed. Do what you are able to do with understanding” (Richard G. Scott, “To Understand and Live Truth” [address to CES religious educators, Feb. 4, 2005], 2).

Decide How You Will Teach

Remember the role of the student as you select different teaching methods for a lesson. Speaking to religious educators, **President J. Reuben Clark Jr.** (1871–1961) stated, “You do not have to sneak up behind this spiritually experienced youth and whisper religion in his ears” (“The Charted Course of the Church in Education” [address to seminary and institute of religion leaders, Aug. 8, 1938], 6). You can

expect students to be spiritually mature and to take their role as learners seriously. When organizing your lesson, help your students take responsibility for their learning. The following suggestions may be helpful:

- Encourage students to read assigned sections of the student manual or general conference addresses and corresponding scriptures before each lesson.
- Give students the opportunity to ask and answer questions. Good questions are a valuable tool in helping students take responsibility for their learning. You may want to occasionally invite students to come to class with a question written down. Help students see that the questions they ask in class may prove to be more important in the learning process than questions asked by the teacher. As they study the teachings of the living prophets, encourage students to identify principles, explain meanings, share insights, and bear testimony of the truths they learn. Create an environment where students feel the Spirit of the Lord and have the privilege and responsibility to listen and speak to edify one another (see D&C 88:122).
- Look for opportunities to use key passages of scripture as a second and third witness to the principles you teach from the curriculum. Allow time for students to identify verses of scripture that add insight or witness to the principles being taught.
- Avoid using lecture as the only teaching method. Instead, allow students to discover truths by guiding them to truths you and others have found. **Elder David A. Bednar** of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that effective teachers help students find answers for themselves:



"I have observed a common characteristic among the instructors who have had the greatest influence in my life. They have helped me to seek learning by faith. They refused to give me easy answers to hard questions. In fact, they did not give me any answers at all. Rather, they pointed the way and helped me take the steps to find my own answers. I certainly did not always appreciate this approach, but experience has enabled me to understand that an answer given by another person usually is not remembered for very long, if remembered at all. But an answer we discover or obtain through the exercise of faith, typically, is retained for a lifetime" (David A. Bednar, "Seek Learning by Faith," *Ensign*, Sept. 2007, 67).

Rather than disseminate information through lecture only, look for teaching methods that will help students take a more active role in the learning process. (For more information on how to teach, see *Gospel Teaching and Learning: A Handbook for Teachers and Leaders in Seminaries and Institutes of Religion* [2012], section 4.3.4.)

- Invite students to apply the counsel of the prophets. Help them become disciples of Jesus Christ and not just gospel scholars. Elder David A. Bednar further counseled us to help students go "beyond mere cognitive comprehension and the retaining and recalling of information" in order to help them "put off the natural man (see Mosiah 3:19), to change [their] hearts (see Mosiah 5:2)" ("Seek Learning by Faith," 64).

Adapting the Manual to Those with Disabilities

When teaching students with disabilities, adapt the lessons to meet their needs. For example, many lessons require students to read either aloud or silently and to write responses on paper. To adapt to nonreading students, you might consider reading aloud yourself, having fellow students read, or using prerecorded materials to narrate the scriptures (such as an audiotope, CD, or mp3). When lessons call for written responses, you might encourage oral responses instead.

For more ideas and resources, go to disabilities.lds.org and the section in the *Seminaries and Institutes of Religion Policy Manual* on “Adapting Classes and Programs for Students with Disabilities.”

CHAPTER 1

Our Need for Living Prophets

Introduction

We live in a day of tremendous opportunities, trials, and temptations. Though great help can be found in the words of past prophets, we are in need of the Lord's continuing guidance fit to the circumstances in which we live. **President John Taylor** (1808–87) taught:

"We require a living tree—a living fountain—living intelligence, proceeding from the living priesthood in heaven, through the living priesthood on earth. ... It always required new revelations, adapted to the peculiar circumstances in which the churches or individuals were placed.

"Adam's revelation did not instruct Noah to build his ark; nor did Noah's revelation tell Lot to forsake Sodom; nor did either of these speak of the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt. These all had revelations for themselves. ... And so must we" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: John Taylor* [2001], 158).

This chapter is designed to help your students understand their need for living prophets and the blessings we receive by heeding their counsel.

Some Doctrines and Principles

- The Lord reveals His will to living prophets now as He did in the past.
- The Lord's Church is built on the foundation of prophets and apostles.
- The members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles are prophets, seers, and revelators.
- Prophets help us build faith in Jesus Christ.
- Safety comes in knowing and applying the teachings of the living prophets.



The First Vision

Ideas for Teaching

The Lord Reveals His Will to Living Prophets Now as He Did in the Past

Share with your class the statement by **President Hugh B. Brown** (1883–1975) of the First Presidency about the need for living prophets from section 1.1 of *Teachings of the Living Prophets Student Manual*.

Read Amos 3:7 as a class and ask:

- How does Amos 3:7 reinforce what President Brown taught?

Write the following references on the board: *1 Nephi 2:1–3*; *Exodus 3 chapter summary*. Invite students to read one of the references and identify what the Lord asked the people to do and who received the revelation. Briefly discuss their findings.

Invite a student to read the statement by **President John Taylor** (1808–87) in section 2.4 of the student manual. Then discuss the reasons President Taylor gave for the need of living prophets.

To emphasize that the Lord reveals to living prophets the counsel and instruction we need in our day, write the word *pornography* on the board. Share with students that the first time the word *pornography* was used in general conference was in October 1959. Over the next 10 years, from 1959 to 1969, it was mentioned 8 times in conference. However, for the 10-year period from 1999 to 2009 it was mentioned or discussed 81 times in general conference. Ask students the following questions:

- Why do you think there has been such a dramatic change in the number of references to pornography by the Brethren? (Be cautious not to allow this to turn into a detailed discussion on pornography; it is simply one example of the need for living prophets based on changing circumstances.)
- What other examples are there of important truths or counsel received in our day through living prophets that may not have been emphasized so much by prophets of the past? (Write students' answers on the board for reference later in the lesson. Answers might include *family home evening* or *warnings against drug abuse, abortion, and homosexuality*.)

Share the following statement by **President Henry B. Eyring** of the First Presidency:



"Revelation and inspiration have come to [President Thomas S. Monson] in my presence. ... I am an eyewitness" (Henry B. Eyring, "The True and Living Church," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2008, 24).

Ask:

- Why is it important to know that the Lord continues to reveal His mind and will through living prophets?

Testify of the need for living prophets in the world today and that the Lord continues to reveal His mind and will through His chosen prophets.

The Lord's Church Is Built on the Foundation of Prophets and Apostles

Draw the accompanying diagram on the board and ask students the following question:

- Knowing the value of a solid foundation, what difference does the type of building material make in a foundation?



Invite students to read Matthew 7:24–27.

Share the following statement by **President Russell M. Nelson** of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:



"About two decades ago when a temple was to be built in Mexico City, architects faced a great challenge. Because Mexico City is situated on a basin over water, some of its buildings settle and become tilted with the passage of time. Construction of a temple there required a special foundation. Two hundred twenty-one large, reinforced concrete piles [each pile was 18 inches in diameter] were driven more than 100 feet deep into the ground. ... With this unseen but sure foundation, that temple today stands steady and straight.

"A firm foundation is necessary for any building, institution, or individual to endure. With that in mind, let us consider the foundation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Then let us see how the solid foundation of the Church supports our foundation of faith as individual members of the Church" (Russell M. Nelson, "How Firm Our Foundation," *Ensign*, May 2002, 75).

Read Ephesians 2:19–21 aloud with the class and use the following questions to help students compare the foundation of the Mexico City Temple to the Church's foundation of prophets and apostles:

- In what ways is the foundation of prophets and apostles similar to the large pilings used to secure the Mexico City Temple?
- What can a person do to be sure he or she is building a strong foundation?

Explain that the Apostle Paul gave some reasons for the foundation of prophets and apostles. Ask a student to read Ephesians 4:11–14. Have the rest of the students look for reasons why the Lord gave prophets and apostles as our foundation.

Discuss students' findings.

Invite a student to read the statement by **Elder Jeffrey R. Holland** of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles from section 1.4 of the student manual. Ask students the following questions:

- According to Elder Holland, why is a foundation of prophets and apostles so vital today?
- What is an example of a teaching from one of the prophets and apostles from the most recent general conference that has helped strengthen your foundation of faith?

- How can adherence to that teaching or other teachings you recall from conference help prevent you from being “tossed to and fro . . . with every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14) in today’s world?

The Members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles Are Prophets, Seers, and Revelators

Hold up a picture of the President of the Church.

Remind the students that during our ward, stake, and general conferences we raise our right hands to the square to manifest that we sustain the General Authorities.

Ask students the following questions:

- What is the wording used when we sustain the President of the Church? (Prophet, seer, and revelator.)
- Is there anyone else we sustain in that same language?
- What is the advantage of having more than one man with that authority?

Invite a student to read the statement by **President Harold B. Lee** (1899–1973) from section 1.5 of the student manual. Ask:

- When the prophet passes away, who has the authority to serve as the next President of the Church?

Write the word *prophet* on the board. Ask students to read the entry in the Bible Dictionary for the word *prophet*. Then ask them to work with another person in class to come up with a brief definition for the word. Invite several students to share their definitions.

Have the students turn to section 1.6 of the student manual and read the information under the subheading “Prophet” (section 1.6.1). Invite students to point out any specific words or phrases that further explain what a prophet is and what he does.

Divide the class into two groups, and instruct them to keep their student manuals open to section 1.6. Assign one group to review the information under the subheading “Seer” (section 1.6.2) and the other group to review the information under the subheading “Revelator” (section 1.6.3).

After sufficient time for review and study, ask each group to choose a spokesperson. Invite this spokesperson to teach the rest of the class how a seer or a revelator is different from a prophet. Encourage them to share their feelings and testimony about why seers and revelators are important today. If any students have personally met an Apostle (a prophet, seer, and revelator) or attended a meeting where an Apostle has spoken in person, encourage them to relate the experience and any feelings they had.

Prophets Help Us Build Faith in Jesus Christ

Read Doctrine and Covenants 1:17 with your class and ask:

- What reason did the Lord state for calling the Prophet Joseph Smith?

Read Doctrine and Covenants 1:21 with your class and ask:

- What additional reason did the Lord state for needing Joseph Smith in the last days?
- How has your knowledge of the life and teachings of Joseph Smith increased your faith?
- How has your knowledge of the life and teachings of other prophets of the Church increased your faith?

Safety Comes in Knowing and Applying the Teachings of the Living Prophets



To help students consider how safety comes through hearkening to living prophets, you may want to show students the video “Watchman on the Tower” (4:17), found on *Doctrine and Covenants and Church History Visual Resource DVDs* and on LDS.org. This video addresses how safety comes through hearkening to living prophets.

Bring a container of cleaning liquid (or any other item that contains a warning on the label) and read the warning on the label to the class. Ask:

- What could happen if the container did not have a warning label or if a person did not heed the warning on the label?
- What parallels do you see between the label on the cleaning bottle and the teachings of a prophet?

Point out that some people might use the cleaning liquid incorrectly and injure themselves because they don’t *know* about the warning, while others who do know about the warning but don’t apply that knowledge will experience the same injury.

- How could the above scenario for misuse of a cleaning liquid be applied to our prophets today?

Invite a student to read Doctrine and Covenants 1:2–4. Ask the rest of your students to identify how the Lord will warn us in the latter days. Then ask the following questions:

- Who are the “disciples” of the Lord in our day?
- How does this warning compare to the warning on the cleaning liquid?

Invite a student to read the statement by **President Harold B. Lee** (1899–1973) in section 1.10 of the student manual. Ask:

- According to President Lee, what is a key to safely making our way through the challenges of life?
- What can we do to ensure that we are seeing the “warning labels” given by latter-day Apostles in the challenges of life today?

Read to your students the following statement from **President Henry B. Eyring** of the First Presidency:



"Because the Lord is kind, He calls servants to warn people of danger. That call to warn is made harder and more important by the fact that the warnings of most worth are about dangers that people don't yet think are real" (Henry B. Eyring, "A Voice of Warning," *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 32).

Ask students:

- How are prophets able to perceive dangers that others fail to perceive? (If students don't bring it up, this may be an appropriate place to bear witness of the role of seers—they see things through revelation that others don't see.)

Read the following statement by **Elder M. Russell Ballard** of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:



"When we hear the counsel of the Lord expressed through the words of the President of the Church, our response should be positive and prompt. History has shown that there is safety, peace, prosperity, and happiness in responding to prophetic counsel" (M. Russell Ballard, "His Word Ye Shall Receive," *Ensign*, May 2001, 65).

Ask students the following questions:

- What are reasons some people give for ignoring the warnings we receive from the Brethren?
- What difference would it make to respond to the warnings and counsels of the prophets and apostles in the way that Elder Ballard described?

Ask your students to look at the list on the board that the class made earlier of important truths revealed by our living prophets. The Brethren invest huge amounts of time, effort, and money to provide general conference; their intent is that the messages, prayers, and music will help us improve our lives. Ask the class:

- What must the Brethren do to ensure this will happen? (Answers might include *being well prepared, being inspired about what subjects to address, and speaking under the influence of the Holy Ghost.*)
- What is my responsibility in this process? (Answers might include *listening, praying for the Brethren who are speaking, praying to be receptive, taking notes, being free of interruption during the conference, and being in tune with the Holy Ghost.*)

Allow enough time for students to think about their answers and make some goals.

Arrange students in pairs. Have each pair study Doctrine and Covenants 21:4–6 and then discuss the following questions (you could write these questions on the board before class):

- *What doctrine is taught in these verses?*
- *Why does it sometimes take faith and patience to heed the counsel of a prophet?*
- *What promises are made to those who give heed to the words and commandments of the prophet?*

Share with your class the following statement by **President Henry B. Eyring** of the First Presidency:



"Looking for the path to safety in the counsel of prophets makes sense to those with strong faith. When a prophet speaks, those with little faith may think that they hear only a wise man giving good advice. ...

"... But the choice not to take prophetic counsel changes the very ground upon which we stand. It becomes more dangerous. The failure to take prophetic counsel lessens our power to take inspired counsel in the future" (Henry B.

Eyring, "Finding Safety in Counsel," *Ensign*, May 1997, 25).

Ask students the following questions:

- Why would "the very ground upon which we stand" become "more dangerous" when we reject the counsel of the prophet?
- What are some examples of counsel the prophet has given during your lifetime that addresses modern-day concerns? (List the students' answers on the board. Answers might include *pornography, gambling, divorce, forgiving others, pride, reading the Book of Mormon*, or other counsel.)

Give each student a sheet of paper. Invite them to select one of the answers listed on the board and write a paragraph describing how heeding this counsel will bring spiritual safety and "will disperse the powers of darkness" (D&C 21:6) in their lives. Invite several students to share what they wrote. For those students who share their response, consider asking them a follow-up question such as:

- When have you felt the truthfulness of this teaching in your life?
- How could you teach and testify of this principle to a family member or friend?

Help students understand that once we recognize the importance of living prophets in our lives, we must act decisively to apply their teachings to our lives. The Lord has sent prophets to help keep us spiritually safe.

CHAPTER 2

The Living Prophet: The President of the Church

Introduction

The keys the President of the Church exercises in his role as prophet, seer, and revelator set him apart from everyone else on earth. The prophet's inspired counsel will always be in harmony with eternal truths and will be focused on the needs and conditions of his day. Heeding his counsel has eternal implications. Help your students know that as they place confidence and trust in the counsel of the living prophet, they will be led to paths of safety. While serving as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, **President Gordon B.**

Hinckley (1910–2008) declared:

"I am satisfied that the peace and the progress and the prosperity of this people lie in doing the will of the Lord as that will is articulated by [the President of the Church]. If we fail to observe his counsel, we repudiate his sacred calling. If we abide his counsel, we shall be blessed" (Gordon B. Hinckley, "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet," *Ensign*, Jan. 1974, 125).

Some Doctrines and Principles

- The President of the Church holds and directs the use of all the keys of the priesthood.
- The teachings and directions of the living prophet take precedence over what former prophets have said.
- The Lord will never permit the living prophet to lead the Church astray.

Ideas for Teaching

The President of the Church Holds and Directs the Use of All the Keys of the Priesthood

Invite a student turn to section 2.1 of *Teachings of the Living Prophets Student Manual*, and ask him or her to read the first four paragraphs (up through "we use them every day") of the account by **President Boyd K. Packer** (1924–2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Then study Matthew 16:15–19; 18:18 with your students. Ask:

- What did the Savior say He would give unto Peter?
- What would these keys enable Peter to do?
- Who else received these keys? (See Matthew 18:18; note that Matthew 18:1 indicates that Jesus spoke these words to His Twelve Apostles.)



President Gordon B. Hinckley (left), President Ezra Taft Benson (center), and President Thomas S. Monson (right)

- Who has been given these same keys today?

Ask a student to finish reading the account by President Packer in section 2.1 of the student manual. Then ask:

- What is meant by the term *priesthood keys*?

Share the following statement from **Elder Bruce R. McConkie** (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:



“The keys of the priesthood are the right and power of presidency. They are the directing, controlling, and governing power. Those who hold them are empowered to direct the manner in which others use their priesthood” (Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* [1985], 309).

Ask the students to summarize, in their own words, Elder McConkie’s definition of priesthood keys.

Read the following scriptures with your class and have students make a list on the board of priesthood keys identified in each verse:

- *Doctrine and Covenants 13:1 (Ministering of angels, gospel of repentance, baptism)*
- *Doctrine and Covenants 84:18–22 (Mysteries of the kingdom, knowledge of God)*
- *Doctrine and Covenants 110:11–16 (Gathering of Israel, dispensation of gospel of Abraham, sealing power)*
- *Doctrine and Covenants 112:16, 30–32; 124:128 (Keys of the kingdom, keys to open the gospel to all the world)*

Ask the class:

- How do these keys affect individual members of the Church? (All gospel ordinances are ministered by those with keys.)
- How does the President of the Church use these keys to direct the work of the Lord on earth? (Opens countries to the gospel, authorizes sealing privileges, builds temples, explains mysteries of the gospel.)

Help students understand the difference between *keys* and *authority* by sharing the following examples:

A priest has the priesthood authority to baptize (see D&C 20:46), but his bishop—who holds keys to preside in the ward (see D&C 107:13–15)—must first give the priest permission to perform the baptism and tell the priest when, how, where, and whom to baptize.

Members of the First Presidency of the Church hold the keys of the sealing powers of the priesthood. They call and set apart other worthy priesthood holders, authorizing them to act as sealers to perform temple sealings.

Share the following statement by **President Gordon B. Hinckley** (1910–2008):



“When a man is ordained to the apostleship and set apart as a member of the Council of the Twelve, he is given the keys of the priesthood of God. Each of the fifteen living men so ordained holds these keys. However, only the President of the Church has the right to exercise them in their fulness. He may delegate the exercise of various of them to one or more of his Brethren. Each has the keys but is authorized to use them only to the degree granted him by the prophet of the Lord” (Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Church Is on Course,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, 54).

Ask the students:

- How does the President of the Church direct the use of priesthood keys by the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles?
- Why do the Apostles need to have the same keys as the President of the Church?

Testify that each of the Presidents of the Church have held all the keys of the priesthood. These keys make the blessings of salvation through the ordinances of the gospel available to all.

The Teachings and Directions of the Living Prophet Take Precedence over What Former Prophets Have Said

Ask students for examples of Church practices that have changed or begun over the years. If students are unable to come up with any, you might suggest some of the following:

1. Sunday meeting schedule (a three-hour block rather than separate meetings in the morning and evening)
2. Tithing funds cover most ward budget needs (previously wards were required to raise their own money for their budgets)
3. Standardized missionary discussions (revised several times in the last 30 years, most recently in *Preach My Gospel* [2004])
4. Smaller temples (small temples meet needs of smaller areas)
5. Perpetual Education Fund (announced in April 2001)
6. Quorums of the Seventy (at one time each stake had a quorum of seventies; then there was only one quorum at the general level; now we have many)

Ask students:

- In what ways would the Church be hampered if we did everything the same way as in earlier generations?
- How have these changes helped the Church grow throughout the world?

Explain that in addition to directing the practices and procedures in Church policies, prophets also clarify and expand our understanding of Church doctrine. Write the following questions on one half of the board:

- *How often did President Spencer W. Kimball say that prophets have received revelation since 1820?*
- *How do revelations often come to living prophets?*
- *What warning did President Kimball give us?*

Assign half of your class to read the statement by **President Spencer W. Kimball** (1895–1985) in section 2.3 of the student manual. Have the students look for answers to the questions on their side of the board as they read.

On the other half of the board, write the following questions:

- *Why did President Brigham Young prefer the words of the living prophet over the scriptures?*
- *What did President Ezra Taft Benson mean when he stated that the prophet has “the power of TNT”?*
- *What did President Benson suggest is the most important reading we can do?*
- *What did President Benson caution us to beware of?*

Assign the other half of the class to read the second and third “fundamentals” from the talk by **President Ezra Taft Benson** (1899–1994) in the “Enrichment Material” at the end of chapter 2 of the student manual. (These are part of a talk titled “Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet.”) Have the students look for answers to the questions on their side of the board as they read.

After students have had sufficient time to read and ponder the material and answer the questions, encourage them to share answers and insights with the class. Ask a few students to share their testimonies of the living prophet and the benefits they have found in following prophetic counsel.

The Lord Will Never Permit the Living Prophet to Lead the Church Astray

Ask one student to read Numbers 12:6–8 and another student to read Exodus 33:11 to the class. Discuss what enables a prophet to know how to lead us.

Divide your class into small groups. Ask each group to read the statements in section 2.5 of the student manual. Have the groups discuss the following questions as they study (you may want to write the questions on the board or provide them on a handout):

- *What did President Wilford Woodruff say would never happen?*
- *What did he say the Lord would do before such a thing could ever happen?*
- *What does it mean to “keep your eye” on the prophet? In what ways can we effectively do that?*
- *What did President Gordon B. Hinckley say is the only desire of the leaders of the Church?*
- *How did he say important decisions of the Church are made?*
- *In what ways does understanding these principles affect our faith in the Church and the living prophet?*
- *Read Deuteronomy 18:18–22. How do these words of Moses support the idea that the Lord will never permit the living prophet to lead the Church astray?*

Invite students to share with the class some of what they discussed in their groups.

CHAPTER 3

Succession in the Presidency

Introduction

The President of the Church was foreordained in the premortal life and is called in mortality after long, faithful service in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He is set apart to exercise the keys of the kingdom of heaven on earth and formally sustained by the membership of the Church.

Help your students understand how important the role of revelation from the Lord to His prophet is in the process of calling Apostles. As the Spirit confirms the divine order of succession, bear testimony and invite your students to testify

of the authority and simplicity of the succession process.

Because there are several quotations suggested in this chapter, you may want to make a handout for your students that includes all of the quotations you plan to use. You may also want to familiarize yourself with the history of succession in the Presidency of the Church from the days of Joseph Smith. This history is summarized in chapter 3 of *Teachings of the Living Prophets Student Manual* in sections 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3.

Some Doctrines and Principles

- The Lord established the order of succession in the Presidency of the Church.
- The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles presides over the Church at the death of the President.
- Seniority in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles determines who presides.
- Church members sustain the newly called President of the Church.

Ideas for Teaching

The Lord Established the Order of Succession in the Presidency of the Church

Invite the students to discuss how leaders or presidents are chosen in a variety of organizations. For example:

- How is the president of a company chosen?
- How is a new leader chosen in a democratic government?
- How is a new leader chosen in a monarchy?
- How does a person become the President of the Church? How is this process different from the way leaders are chosen in other organizations?



The solemn assembly at the opening session of general conference in October 1972. In this meeting, Church members sustained a new First Presidency consisting of Harold B. Lee (President), Marion G. Romney (First Counselor), and N. Eldon Tanner (Second Counselor).

Inform the students that the Lord Himself determines who will lead the Church. By divine instruction, the Apostle with the most seniority (the one who has been an Apostle the longest) becomes the presiding high priest of the Church. The membership of the Church can have full faith that he is the individual whom the Lord desires and places in position to become the President of the Church (see item 3 in section 3.4 of the student manual). Because of this, the manner of succession of the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is unique.

Read the quotation by **President Spencer W. Kimball** (1895–1985) in section 3.5 of the student manual. Invite students to discuss the following questions:

- How does the pattern for succession of the President of the Church eliminate errors, conflicts, ambitions, and ulterior motives?
- How does knowing that a new President of the Church is called to his office by God, instead of according to worldly systems, build your faith and strengthen your testimony?

Divide the class into three groups. Write the following scripture references on the board: *Jeremiah 1:5; Abraham 3:22–23; Doctrine and Covenants 138:53–56; Alma 13:1–9*. Invite each group to study one of the first three references as well as Alma 13:1–9. Give each group a copy of the following statement by the **Prophet Joseph Smith** (1805–44):



“Every man who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world was ordained to that very purpose in the Grand Council of heaven before this world was. I suppose that I was ordained to this very office in that Grand Council”
(*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 511).

Ask the groups to look for answers to the following questions as they study their scripture passages and the quotation:

- When did the Lord choose the men who would be Presidents, prophets, and leaders of the Church?
- How did prophets distinguish themselves in the premortal world?
- Other than prophets, who else was foreordained in the premortal life?
- How does this knowledge affect your confidence in the person the Lord chooses to be the prophet?

Choose a spokesperson from each of the groups. Invite the spokesperson to share with the class the answers his or her group found to the questions and any other insights they had.

The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles Presides over the Church at the Death of the President

Write the equation $3 = 12$ on the board. Ask the students to read Doctrine and Covenants 107:23–24 and explain in what sense the equation is true. (In the sense

that the Quorum of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles are equal in authority.)

Share the following statement by **President Joseph Fielding Smith** (1876–1972):



“I think it must be conceded that the apostles could not be equal in authority with the Presidency when the First Presidency is fully and properly organized. There could not be two heads—or three heads—of equal authority at the same time, for such a thing would lead to confusion. Hence the apostles are equal, as has been stated, in that they have power to assume control of the affairs of the Church when the Presidency is dissolved by the death of the President” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. [1954–56], 1:255).

- According to President Smith, when is the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles “equal in authority and power” to the First Presidency?
- Why would the phrase “equal but under” be appropriate in describing the relationships of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and the First Presidency?

To illustrate that the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles becomes the composite leadership of the Church and that the Church is never without divinely appointed leadership, invite a student to read the statement by **President Spencer W. Kimball** (1895–1985) in section 3.7 of the student manual.

Read the statement by **President Gordon B. Hinckley** (1910–2008) in section 3.6 of the student manual. Then ask:

- When does the President of the Church receive the keys of his office?
- What is the difference in the way the members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles hold all the keys of the priesthood and the way the President of the Church holds the same keys?
- When does the senior member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles become authorized to exercise the keys of the priesthood he was ordained to?

Point out to students that following the death of the Prophet Joseph Smith, President Brigham Young led the Church as the President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles for over three years before the First Presidency was reorganized in December 1847. Ask:

- By what right did President Brigham Young lead the Church following the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph?

Help your students understand that it is the prerogative of the senior Apostle to decide when the Quorum of the First Presidency should be reorganized and that the senior Apostle can preside over the whole Church as President of the Twelve until he feels the need to reorganize the First Presidency. The rest of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles then sustains his decision.

Seniority in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles Determines Who Presides

Advance preparation: Before class, you may want to list the names of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in random order on the board

or on a handout, or you could display their pictures (if available) in random order on the board. Use a recent *Ensign* or *Liahona* conference issue for reference.

Review the principle that when the President of the Church dies, the Quorum of the First Presidency is dissolved and the counselors in the First Presidency return to their order of seniority within the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Ask:

- What is the apostolic seniority of the current counselors in the First Presidency?

Show students a list of names, or show pictures, of the members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in random order. Ask the class to arrange the names or pictures in the proper order of seniority. After a short time, help them complete the assignment correctly.

Encourage students to memorize the names of members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the order of their seniority.

Help students understand that the members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles have always been ordered according to seniority. When the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles was first organized in this dispensation, seniority was determined by age (see *History of the Church*, 2:219–20). Since that time, seniority has been determined according to the date of each member's ordination to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. This seniority not only determines the order of succession to the Presidency but also the order of leadership within the quorum. **President Russell M. Nelson** of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained:



"Seniority is honored among ordained Apostles—even when entering or leaving a room. ...

"Such deference from a junior to a senior Apostle is recorded in the New Testament. When Simon Peter and John the Beloved ran to investigate the report that the body of their crucified Lord had been taken from the sepulcher, John, being younger and swifter, arrived first, yet he did not enter. He deferred to the senior Apostle, who entered the sepulcher first. (See John 20:2–6.)" (Russell M. Nelson, "Honoring the Priesthood," *Ensign*, May 1993, 40).

Note: If time allows, you may want to have students read the statement by **President N. Eldon Tanner** (1898–1982) of the First Presidency in section 3.8 of the student manual. It describes the circumstances existing when President Marion G. Romney of the First Presidency and President Spencer W. Kimball, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, responded to the news of the death of President Harold B. Lee, who had been serving as President of the Church.

Share the following statement by **President Boyd K. Packer** (1924–2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, explaining the advantage of the model of senior leadership:



“Have you ever wondered why the Lord organized the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles so that the senior leadership of the Church will always be older men? This pattern of seniority values wisdom and experience over youth and physical vigor” (Boyd K. Packer, “The Golden Years,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2003, 84).

Ask students:

- Why do you think wisdom and experience are more important in Church leadership than youth and physical vigor?

Church Members Sustain the Newly Called President of the Church

Note: If your students do not understand the meaning of “solemn assembly,” refer them to the information in section 3.9 of the student manual.

Explain to your students that one of the most sacred meetings in the Church is the solemn assembly, where members of the Church sustain a newly called President of the Church. Members of the Church throughout the world are encouraged to participate, either in person or by means of radio, television, satellite, or the internet. The quorums and organizations of the Church stand independently and vote to sustain the President of the Church.

Ask a student to read the statement by **Elder David B. Haight** (1906–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in section 3.9 of the student manual. This statement explains the protocol of the solemn assembly.

Ask students:

- Why do you think the Church follows such a formal procedure for sustaining a newly called President of the Church?
- What privileges are offered to members of the Church through this formal presentation of a new Church President?
- What responsibilities rest upon the members of the Church after they have sustained a new President?

Ask your students if any of them have had the opportunity to attend a solemn assembly and participate in the sustaining of a new prophet. Invite several students to share the feelings they experienced while attending and participating in this sacred meeting.

Remind your students that at every conference of the Church, members are invited to sustain the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Sustaining Church leaders means “to pledge support to those serving in general and local Church leadership positions” (Guide to the Scriptures, “Sustaining Church Leaders,” scriptures.lds.org; see also Hebrews 13:17; 3 Nephi 12:1; D&C 1:38; 112:20).

Invite students to read Doctrine and Covenants 107:22; then ask the following questions:

- According to this verse, how should the members of the Church sustain the First Presidency?
- What does it mean to uphold the President of the Church with our confidence?

Challenge the students to sustain the President of the Church by showing confidence in his teachings and faith in his leadership, by offering prayers in his behalf, and by obeying his counsel.

Bear your testimony of the great blessing it is to sustain and receive counsel from the man the Lord chooses to be the President of His Church.

CHAPTER 4

The Quorum of the First Presidency

Introduction

The First Presidency holds the “keys of the kingdom” and is the highest presiding council in the Church (D&C 81:2; see also D&C 81 section summary; 107:80–81). The Lord communicates His will to the First Presidency. As the presiding quorum of the Church, the First Presidency is the ultimate authority on the earth for Church doctrine.

President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) made the following promise to those who follow the counsel of the First Presidency:

“I think there is one thing which we should have exceedingly clear in our minds. Neither the President of the Church, nor the First Presidency ... will ever lead the Saints astray or send forth counsel to the world that is contrary to the mind and will of the Lord. ...

“I testify that if we shall look to the First Presidency and

follow their counsel and direction, no power on earth can stay or change our course as a church, and as individuals we shall gain peace in this life and be inheritors of eternal glory in the world to come” (Joseph Fielding Smith, “Eternal Keys and the Right to Preside,” *Ensign*, July 1972, 88).

Help students understand the importance of following the First Presidency. Review the promises given to those who do. As a result of this lesson, students should feel a greater desire to sustain and be in harmony with the First Presidency. They should feel to exclaim, like **President Boyd K. Packer** of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “Thank God for the presidency. Like [mountain] peaks, they stand with nothing above them but the heavens” (“The Spirit Beareth Record,” *Ensign*, June 1971, 87).

Some Doctrines and Principles

- The Lord revealed instructions about the First Presidency to the Prophet Joseph Smith.
- The First Presidency holds the keys of the kingdom, which include the authority to direct the work of the Lord on the earth.
- As the President of the Church is sustained by his counselors and Church members, the entire Church is blessed.

Ideas for Teaching

The Lord Revealed Instructions about the First Presidency to the Prophet Joseph Smith

List the following events on the board, and ask students to arrange them in chronological order:



The First Presidency in 1894: George Q. Cannon, First Counselor (left); Wilford Woodruff, President (center); and Joseph F. Smith, Second Counselor (right).

Organization of the Church

Joseph Smith's First Vision

Restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood

Restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood

Answer: (1) Joseph Smith's First Vision; (2) restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood; (3) restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood; (4) organization of the Church.

Ask students:

- Why do you think these events occurred in this order? Why couldn't they have occurred in a different order?

Have a student read Doctrine and Covenants 128:20–21. Then ask:

- How does this scripture help explain the order of events in the Restoration? (note particularly the last portion of verse 21).

Explain that the Lord also revealed the organization of Church government line upon line, including instructions about the Quorum of the First Presidency. When the Church was first organized, there was not yet a First Presidency as we have today.

Ask students to read the chart in section 4.2 of *Teachings of the Living Prophets Student Manual*. Then ask:

- What title was used for Joseph Smith's position when the Church was first organized on April 6, 1830?
- How long after the organization of the Church was the First Presidency established?
- Why do you think the full organization of Church leadership was not present from the time the Church was first organized?

Bear testimony that from the time of the Prophet Joseph Smith to today, the Lord has instructed His prophets about how to organize and lead His Church, revealing knowledge as it was needed, line upon line (see D&C 128:21). When the time was right, the Lord revealed instructions to Joseph Smith about organizing the First Presidency.

The First Presidency Holds the Keys of the Kingdom, Which Include the Authority to Direct the Work of the Lord on the Earth

Ask students to turn to Doctrine and Covenants 90. Point out that the section heading indicates that "this revelation is a continuing step in the establishment of the First Presidency." Ask a student to read Doctrine and Covenants 90:9. Explain that the term "your administration" refers to the President of the Church and the term "their administration" refers to the counselors in the First Presidency. Ask:

- In this verse, what is the difference between the role of the President and the role of his counselors? (The President receives the word; the counselors help the word go forth to the ends of the earth.)

Write on the board: *The President directs.* (You might want to point out that the President's role of receiving revelations for the whole Church is also mentioned in D&C 90:4.)

Ask a student to read Doctrine and Covenants 90:6. Then ask:

- Whom did the Lord name as counselors to the Prophet Joseph Smith? (Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams.)
- According to this verse, in what sense are the counselors in the First Presidency equal to but under the direction of the President? (In holding the keys.)

Write on the board: *Counselors are equal in holding keys.*

Invite a student to read the commentary by **Elder John A. Widtsoe** (1872–1952) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in section 4.4 of the student manual.

Referring to the two principles you have written on the board, explain that understanding these two truths is necessary to understand how the First Presidency functions in leading the Church.

As an example, have a student read Doctrine and Covenants 102:9–11. Then ask:

- If the President of the Church is unavailable due to illness or other circumstances, what is the way the Lord has provided for His work to continue?

Note: You might ask the students to read the first of the two statements by **President Gordon B. Hinckley** (1910–2008) in section 4.7 of the student manual.

Write the following list of scriptures on the board and assign groups of students to read them, looking for duties of the First Presidency. Give time for students to search, and then invite each group to report their findings and create a list of First Presidency duties on the board.

<i>Scriptures</i>	<i>Duties of the First Presidency</i>
<i>D&C 68:14–15</i>	
<i>D&C 90:16</i>	
<i>D&C 107:8–9</i>	
<i>D&C 107:33</i>	
<i>D&C 107:78–81</i>	

<i>Scriptures</i>	<i>Duties of the First Presidency</i>
<i>D&C 120 section heading and verse 1</i>	
<i>D&C 124:126</i>	

Your finished list might look like this:

<i>Scriptures</i>	<i>Duties of the First Presidency</i>
<i>D&C 68:14–15</i>	<i>Appoint bishops</i>
<i>D&C 90:16</i>	<i>Preside, set in order all the affairs of the Church</i>
<i>D&C 107:8–9</i>	<i>Officiate over all offices in the Church</i>
<i>D&C 107:33</i>	<i>Direct the labors of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles</i>
<i>D&C 107:78–81</i>	<i>Decide difficult cases, settle spiritual controversies</i>
<i>D&C 120 section heading and verse 1</i>	<i>Make decisions about the disposition (use) of tithes</i>
<i>D&C 124:126</i>	<i>Receive oracles (revelations) for the entire Church</i>

Assign each group to read one of the following quotations from chapter 4 of the student manual, looking for additional duties of the First Presidency. (You could have students add their findings to the list on the board.)

1. **President James E. Faust** (1920–2007) of the First Presidency (see section 4.9 of the student manual).
2. **President Joseph Fielding Smith** (1876–1972) (see the second of the two statements by President Smith in section 4.5 of the student manual).

Ask the students:

- How have the duties of the First Presidency affected your life?

As the President of the Church Is Sustained by His Counselors and Church Members, the Entire Church Is Blessed

Review the list of First Presidency duties on the board and the duties of the President of the Church that you studied in chapter 2.

Ask a student to read Exodus 17:8–13. Point out that Aaron and Hur were like counselors in the First Presidency. Then discuss the following questions:

- Ultimately, what happened to Israel because Aaron and Hur helped Moses by holding up his arms?
- What should Israel have learned that day as they watched the battle progress and saw Moses upon the hill?
- What lessons can we draw from this account that apply to us today?

Invite a student to read the statement by **Elder William R. Walker** of the Seventy in section 4.6 of the student manual. Ask:

- How do the counselors in the First Presidency help bear the weight carried by the prophet today?

Note: You might also share the comments of **President N. Eldon Tanner** (1898–1982) of the First Presidency in section 4.8 of the student manual. Then ask:

- Who else, along with his counselors, helps the prophet carry that weight?

Ask students to read the statement by **President Harold B. Lee** (1899–1973) in section 4.11 of the student manual. Then ask:

- What can we do today as members of the Church to sustain and support the First Presidency?
- In what ways do you think “the confidence, faith, and prayer[s]” (D&C 107:22) of Church members help the prophet and his counselors carry their weight?

Have students read Doctrine and Covenants 21:4–6, looking for what happens to us as a people when we sustain the prophet and his counselors. Then ask the following questions:

- According to these verses, what blessings come to members of the Church when we sustain the prophet and his counselors?
- How is that like what happened to the Israelites when Aaron and Hur upheld Moses’s arms?
- When have you felt strengthened, protected, or blessed by sustaining the President of the Church and his counselors?

Have a student read the statements by the **Prophet Joseph Smith** (1805–1844) in section 4.12 of the student manual. Ask:

- In what ways has instruction given by members of the First Presidency been a blessing in your life?

You might consider drawing students’ attention to the pamphlet *For the Strength of Youth*, which the First Presidency prepared for the youth of the Church. You could have students share ways they have been blessed by living Church standards.

Invite a student to read the statement by **President Joseph Fielding Smith** (1876–1972) in section 4.13 of the student manual. Then bear testimony of this and the other blessings promised to those who follow the First Presidency. Invite students to sustain and follow the First Presidency throughout their lives.

CHAPTER 5

The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Introduction

The Church is built “upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 2:20). This chapter provides opportunities to help students see how the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles guides the Church with inspired leadership and testimony. Concerning this leadership, **Elder Jeffrey R. Holland** of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles testified:

“As the least of those who have been sustained by you to witness the guidance of this Church firsthand, I say with all the fervor of my soul that never in my personal or professional life have I ever associated with any group who

are so *in touch*, who know so profoundly the issues facing us, who look so deeply into the old, stay so open to the new, and weigh so carefully, thoughtfully, and prayerfully everything in between” (Jeffrey R. Holland, “Prophets in the Land Again,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2006, 105–6).

At the conclusion of this lesson, your students should understand that with the sacred keys of priesthood authority, the Apostles advance the kingdom of God throughout the earth.

Some Doctrines and Principles

- Apostles are special witnesses for Jesus Christ in all the world.
- Apostles labor to advance the kingdom of God.
- The decisions of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles are unanimous.

Ideas for Teaching

Advance preparation: In case your students are unfamiliar with the members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, the Church’s website newsroom.lds.org has materials that provide valuable assistance. You can download pictures, brief biographical sketches, or more detailed biographical articles to help students become familiar with our current Apostles.



The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles outside the Salt Lake Temple in 1931.

Apostles Are Special Witnesses for Jesus Christ in All the World

Invite one student to read Doctrine and Covenants 107:23 and another to read Acts 4:33. Then ask the following questions:

- According to these verses, what is the duty of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles?
- What are they to bear witness of?

- Where are Apostles to bear this “special” witness?

Read the account related by **President Harold B. Lee** (1899–1973) in section 5.2 of *Teachings of the Living Prophets Student Manual*. Stop at the part of the quotation that reads “What shall we answer?” Ask the students:

- How would you advise the missionaries to answer?

After some student responses, read the rest of the quotation. Then ask:

- In what ways does President Lee’s response reflect his calling to be a “special witness” of Jesus Christ?

Share the following statement by **President Joseph Fielding Smith** (1876–1972):



“This is an exacting duty upon [the Apostles], to know that Jesus Christ is in very deed the Only Begotten Son of God, the Redeemer of the world” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Seek Ye Earnestly* [1970], 213).

Then ask:

- What do you think President Smith meant when he said it is “an exacting duty”?

Share with your students the statement by **President Howard W. Hunter** (1907–1995) in section 5.2 of the student manual. Then ask students the following questions:

- What did President Hunter specifically bear testimony of?
- How can hearing the testimony of an Apostle strengthen our testimonies?

Invite students to pay close attention whenever they hear or read the testimony of an Apostle. Invite students to strengthen their testimonies of the truths to which the Apostles bear witness.

Apostles Labor to Advance the Kingdom of God

Share with students the first of the two statements by **President Gordon B. Hinckley** (1910–2008) in section 5.5 of the student manual. Ask students to listen for the definition of an Apostle. Then ask:

- What did President Hinckley say was the meaning of the word *Apostle*?
- What have Apostles been given “certain authority and responsibility” to do?

Read Matthew 28:16–20 and Doctrine and Covenants 65:5–6 with your class and ask:

- What commission did Jesus Christ give to His Apostles in these verses?
- If the Apostles are to build God’s kingdom throughout the earth, what is God’s kingdom? (God’s kingdom is the Church on the earth today. The Apostles help

build the kingdom of God—the Church—on the earth today so the kingdom of heaven—the millennial Church—may come.)

As an illustration of how living Apostles fulfill this divine commission, share the following statement by **President Boyd K. Packer** (1924–2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:



"I am no different from the Brethren of the Twelve ... when I tell you that the records show I have been in Mexico and Central and South America more than 75 times, in Europe over 50 times, Canada 25 times, the islands of the Pacific 10 times, Asia 10 times, and Africa 4 times; also China twice; to Israel, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the Dominican Republic, India, Pakistan, Egypt, Indonesia, and many, many other places around the globe. Others have traveled even more than that"

(Boyd K. Packer, "The Twelve," *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2008, 86).

Then ask:

- What knowledge do you think the Apostles gain from such extensive travel?

Assign half of the class to read Doctrine and Covenants 107:33–35, 58 and the other half to read Doctrine and Covenants 18:27–32. Have students identify words and phrases that describe what Apostles are "sent forth" to do today. On the board, write (or ask a student to write) the words and phrases that students identify.

(Some words and phrases may include *officiate, build up the Church, regulate, open doors, proclaim the gospel, ordain, set in order, preach to every creature, baptize, and declare the gospel according to the Holy Ghost.*) Then ask:

- What are some ways that our living Apostles proclaim the gospel and build up the Church today? (Speak in general conference, visit local conferences, tour missions, interview local Church leaders, conduct worldwide leadership training broadcasts, and so on.)

Invite a student to read the second of the two statements by **President Gordon B. Hinckley** in section 5.5 of the student manual (see the last paragraph in the section). Then ask the following questions:

- In what ways have you seen or heard of the Apostles ministering in the way President Hinckley described?
- What influence have the Apostles had on you as an individual?

The Decisions of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles Are Unanimous

Read Doctrine and Covenants 107:27–31 and ask:

- What principles did the Lord say should govern the decisions made by the Twelve?
- What promise is given in verse 31 if decisions are made according to the guidelines provided in verses 27 and 30? What do you think that promise means?

Share with the students the statement by **President Gordon B. Hinckley** at the end of section 5.7 of the student manual (in the last paragraph, beginning with “But I have never observed ...”). Then ask:

- How can knowing that the Apostles’ decisions are made in unanimity increase your faith and confidence in those decisions?

Share with the class the statement by **President James E. Faust** (1920–2007) of the First Presidency in section 5.7 of the student manual. Encourage students to listen for what brings unanimity among the Brethren. Then ask the following questions:

- How would this process serve as a “check” against personal bias or personal agendas?
- What did President Faust suggest is needed in order for unanimity to be achieved?

Conclude the lesson by sharing your testimony of the calling and role of the Twelve Apostles. Challenge students to pay close attention to the testimonies of the Twelve and the topics they choose to address in their talks.

CHAPTER 6

General Conference

Introduction

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained some of the purposes of general conference:

"A general conference of the Church is a declaration to all the world that Jesus is the Christ, that He and His Father, the God and Father of us all, appeared to the boy prophet Joseph Smith in fulfillment of that ancient promise that the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth would again restore His Church on earth. . . . [These conferences proclaim] to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people the loving messianic promise that 'his mercy endureth for ever' [Psalm 136:1; 1 Chronicles 16:34]" (Jeffrey R. Holland, "Prophets in the Land Again," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2006, 106).

General conference provides an opportunity for Church members to listen to and learn from those we sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators. Help your students understand the importance of preparing for general conference and applying the words of living prophets. Furthermore, help them understand the need to regularly study the *Ensign* or *Liahona* conference issues. Students' desires to apply the words of the modern prophets in their lives will increase as they recognize the blessings that come from following prophetic warnings and counsel. Encourage students to also seek out the teachings of living prophets that are contained in other Church publications or are given on occasions other than general conference.

Some Doctrines and Principles

- General conference provides opportunities for spiritual renewal.
- We commit to heed and support those we sustain in general conference.
- Our preparation affects what we gain from general conference.
- Applying the teachings of general conference will improve our lives.

Suggestions for Teaching

General Conference Provides Opportunities for Spiritual Renewal

Before class, write on the board the four "Doctrines and Principles" listed above. Ask:

- What words in these statements indicate responsibility on our part?
- Why do some individuals gain more spiritual strength from the proceedings of general conference than others?
- What can you do to gain the most from general conference?

Write on the board: *Conference time is a season of . . .*



The assembly hall of the Conference Center during a general conference session.

Ask students how they would complete this phrase. Record their answers on the board. Invite a student to read the quotation by **President Howard W. Hunter** (1907–1995) in section 6.2 of *Teachings of the Living Prophets Student Manual*. Ask students to listen for how President Hunter completed the phrase that is written on the board. Then ask:

- In what ways have you experienced the fulfillment of President Hunter’s statement?

Have students search Doctrine and Covenants 43:8–9; 124:144 and answer the following questions:

- What are some of the purposes of general conference?
- What is the meaning of the word *edify*?

Share the following definition of what it means to edify, made by **Elder Robert L. Backman** of the Seventy:



“To edify means to build up, to increase the faith of, to improve the morality of. When you think about it, this is the way the Lord has built his kingdom. Just think what it means to us to feel the brotherhood of Jesus Christ in our gatherings. ‘Wherefore, be faithful; stand in the office which I have appointed unto you; succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees.’ (D&C 81:5.)” (Robert L. Backman, in “Giving Spiritual Nourishment to the Less Active: A Panel Discussion,” *Ensign*, Apr. 1987, 16).

Then ask:

- In what ways has general conference been an “edifying” experience for you?

Testify that general conference, if we give it the proper attention and attitude, will provide spiritual renewal and help us improve and become more like the Savior.

We Commit to Heed and Support Those We Sustain in General Conference

Assign half of the class to read the statement by **President Gordon B. Hinckley** (1910–2008) in section 6.5 of the student manual. Assign the other half to read the statement by **Elder David B. Haight** (1906–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in section 6.5 of the student manual. When they are finished, ask the following questions:

- What does it signify when we raise our hand to sustain our leaders?
- What can we do to show we sustain our leaders?

Arrange students in pairs and give each pair a piece of paper. Have them read the following scriptures. Invite each pair to write a short statement explaining the doctrine conveyed in each of these scriptures:

2 Chronicles 20:20

Matthew 10:41

Doctrine and Covenants 1:38

Doctrine and Covenants 107:22

Doctrine and Covenants 112:20

After sufficient time, ask students to share with the class some of what they have written.

Assign half of your class to read the statement by **President Henry B. Eyring** of the First Presidency from section 6.5 of the student manual. Ask students to be prepared to discuss the following questions:

- What should we do after we raise our hand in sustaining vote in general conference?
- What effect will our actions have on our leaders?
- What effect will our actions have on us?

Assign the other half of the class to read the statement by **President Joseph F. Smith** (1838–1918) from section 6.5 of the student manual. Ask students to be prepared to discuss the following questions:

- How did Joseph F. Smith feel about Brigham Young?
- What effect did heeding the call of a prophet have on President Smith?

Invite students to discuss their findings with the other half of the class.

Encourage students to talk about the blessings they or their families have received in heeding and supporting the Lord’s servants. Express your own feelings about following the Lord’s servants.

Our Preparation Affects What We Gain from General Conference

Explain to the students that how they prepare for general conference may depend on how the proceedings are made available to them. Help students understand that even though the circumstances in which they receive and listen to general conference vary, how they prioritize and prepare for general conference is what really determines what they will gain from it. Ask:

- What are some daily, weekly, and monthly priorities in your life that you take time to prepare for?
- What motivates you to prepare for a particular event over another? (You may want to list student responses on the board.)

Share with students the statement by **President Boyd K. Packer** (1924–2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in section 6.6 of the student manual. Then ask students:

- Why do you think what we will gain from conference depends more on our preparation than on the preparation of the speakers?

Have students turn to section 6.6 of the student manual and read the experience related by **Elder Paul V. Johnson** of the Seventy. Then ask students the following questions:

- In what ways do you feel we can grow to love the words of the prophets and apostles as Elder Johnson does?

- What did Elder Johnson encourage us to decide?
- Once general conference is a priority in our lives, what practices would help us prepare for the counsel given there?

Ask students what they have found to be helpful in preparing themselves for general conference. Once students have suggested their ideas, you could have the class read the list of four preparation ideas in section 6.6 of the student manual.

Explain to students that the list in the student manual is not meant to be complete; it merely gives ideas and suggestions. After students have had time to read the list, invite them to share times when they have applied a particular suggestion and experienced greater personal growth. Invite students to testify of successful practices that they have found.

Testify to your students that when general conference is a priority in our lives, our desire to prepare for it increases. In addition, invite students to share with family and friends their thoughts and ideas on how to prepare to receive the Lord's word through His servants.

Applying the Teachings of General Conference Will Improve Our Lives

Relate the following account shared by **Elder Jeffrey R. Holland** of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:



"President Boyd K. Packer ... has a question he often asks when we have made a presentation or given some sort of exhortation to one another in the Twelve. He looks up as if to say, 'Are you through?' And then says to the speaker ... , 'Therefore, what?'"

"'Therefore, what?' I think that is what the Savior answered day in and day out as an inseparable element of His teaching and preaching. ... These sermons and exhortations were to no avail if the actual lives of His disciples did not change" (Jeffrey R. Holland, "Therefore, What?" [CES conference on the New Testament, Aug. 8, 2000], 4–5).

Ask the following questions:

- Why do you think President Packer asks, "Therefore, what?"
- In what ways can our lives change because of what we experience during general conference?

Invite a student to read Doctrine and Covenants 43:8–10. Then ask students the following questions:

- According to verse 8, what goals might Church leaders have as they prepare to speak to the Saints in general conference?
- According to verse 9, how should we as members of the Church respond to what we hear from our leaders in general conference?
- According to verse 10, what are the results of acting on or not acting on what we hear at general conference?

Invite students to read the two statements by **President Spencer W. Kimball** (1895–1985) in section 6.8 of the student manual. Then ask the following questions:

- What value did President Kimball place on the conference *Ensign*?
- What did President Kimball say we should do with the conference *Ensign*?
- What thoughts come into your mind when you hear these statements from President Kimball?
- What do these statements cause you to feel you ought to do?

Invite two students to turn to section 6.8 of the student manual. Ask one student to read the statement by **President Ezra Taft Benson** (1899–1994), and ask the other student to read the statement by **President Gordon B. Hinckley** (1910–2008). Then discuss the following questions:

- What are some ways general conference can guide our “walk and talk”?
- What is the “test” President Hinckley described to determine whether general conference is successful?
- How does President Hinckley suggest we measure improvement in our lives? (Have a student write responses to this question on the board.)
- What specific suggestions did President Hinckley give to help us apply the teachings of what we learned in general conference?
- What benefits do you think come to families who use the conference issues of the *Ensign* or *Liahona* for their family home evenings and their family scripture study?

As they review the conference addresses, encourage students to identify and record blessings they receive. Further, you may want to invite your students to record in a notebook, journal, or their scriptures the spiritual growth they have recognized in their lives as they have applied the teachings of living prophets.

Conclude by explaining that the rest of this course will help students better understand the most recent counsel given by the prophets, seers, and revelators. Moreover, it will demonstrate how they can more fully apply in their lives the principles taught in general conference and share them with others. Share your feelings about the importance of general conference and testify that conference is a time when the word and will of the Lord is delivered to His children by His servants, the prophets.

CHAPTER 7

Studying General Conference Addresses

Introduction

Chapters 1–6 provide a doctrinal understanding of the role of living prophets, seers, and revelators. Chapter 7 discusses teaching from the conference issue of the *Ensign* or *Liahona*. As stated in the course introduction, it is not intended that a teacher take the entire semester to teach the first six chapters. Rather, this course is designed so that the majority of class time will be spent discussing and learning from the most recent general conference. Teachers may take class time to study an entire talk or parts of several talks.

A primary goal of this course is to help students learn from the words of living prophets. **Elder David A. Bednar** of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught religious educators that they must help students become spiritually self-reliant:

“We are all familiar with the adage that giving a man a fish feeds him for one meal. Teaching the man to fish, on the other hand, feeds him for a lifetime. As gospel instructors, you and I are not in the business of distributing fish; rather, our work is to help individuals learn to ‘fish’ and to become spiritually self-reliant. . . .

“I have observed a common characteristic among the instructors who have had the greatest influence in my life. They have helped me to seek learning by faith. They refused

to give me easy answers to hard questions. In fact, they did not give me any answers at all. Rather, they pointed the way and helped me take the steps to find my own answers. I certainly did not always appreciate this approach, but experience has enabled me to understand that an answer given by another person usually is not remembered for very long, if remembered at all. But an answer we discover or obtain through the exercise of faith, typically, is retained for a lifetime. The most important learnings of life are caught—not taught” (David A. Bednar, “Seek Learning by Faith,” *Ensign*, Sept. 2007, 67).

Note: Students should be encouraged and expected to bring a personal copy of the most recent conference issue of the *Ensign* or *Liahona* to class each time you meet.

Advance preparation: Included at the end of this lesson are two copies of President Dieter F. Uchtdorf’s talk “We Are Doing a Great Work and Cannot Come Down” from the April 2009 general conference (see *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2009, 59–62)—the first one is for teachers and the second one is for students. Make a copy of the student talk for each of your students.

Suggestions for Teaching

Scripture Study Skills That Can Be Used to Study Conference Talks

Ask your students:

- How are studying and searching different from reading?

Hold up a copy of a school textbook in front of your students and ask:

- What specific strategies have you used to improve comprehension and retention of material found in school textbooks? (List student responses on the board, such as *memorizing*, *rereading*, *marking important material*, and *taking notes*.)

Note: It is not necessary to take a lot of time having students explain these strategies. Brief, simple answers are sufficient.

Hold up a copy of the most recent conference issue of the *Ensign* or *Liahona* and ask:

- Besides the written texts of the conference addresses, what other parts of the magazine can help enhance your study? (Answers might include “Contents” and “Topic Index” in the front of the magazine and “They Spoke to Us” and “Conference Story Index” in the back of the magazine.)

Explain to your class that general conference addresses can be studied using many of the same skills used to study school textbooks and, more importantly, skills used to study the scriptures. Ask:

- What are some scripture study skills you have used to better understand the scriptures? (Add student responses to the list on the board; they may include *prayer, pondering, reading aloud, and cross-referencing.*)

As students give a response, encourage them to briefly explain how that scripture study skill has helped them to understand the meaning of the scriptures.

Have students turn to section 7.2 of *Teachings of the Living Prophets Student Manual*. Divide the list of 17 study skills described in this section among the students. Invite students to take two or three minutes to study their assigned study skills. After a few minutes, ask the students to describe those study skills to the rest of the class. As the students make their presentations, add to the board any additional study skills not already mentioned.

Give each student a copy of the talk “We Are Doing a Great Work and Cannot Come Down” by **President Dieter F. Uchtdorf** of the First Presidency (found at the end of this chapter). Divide your class into four groups. Assign each group to read and look for one of the following items:



- Cross-references to the scriptures
- Encouragements or invitations
- Memorable phrases
- Repetitions

Note: One unmarked copy of President Uchtdorf’s talk is provided for distribution to the students, as well as another copy for the teacher with the examples of these four items highlighted (both copies of the talk are located at the end of this chapter—the teacher’s copy first). The teacher’s copy demonstrates only a few of the items described above. In their study of the talk, the students may find several other examples not found in the teacher’s copy.

After giving students sufficient time to study the talk, ask each group to report their findings and describe how using that study skill strengthened their understanding of President Uchtdorf's message.

Encourage students throughout the remainder of the course to use the study skills described in chapter 7 of their student manuals to enhance their study of the conference issue of the *Ensign* or *Liahona*. These skills can also be effectively used to study talks given by the Brethren on occasions other than general conference or to study other articles they have written for Church magazines. Share with your students how you have benefited by using some of these skills in your study of general conference messages.

Ways to Teach the General Conference Talks

Make sure students know in advance what talks will be covered in class. You may want to provide a class outline that lists which talks will be discussed each class period. Ensure that each student has a copy of the talk, and encourage them to read and study the talk before class. This will enable the students to participate more fully in class discussions.

As with any course, using a variety of teaching techniques helps maintain a student's interest and gospel growth. Following are some suggestions for teaching general conference addresses:

- *Show portions of general conference.* While playing a video recording of a talk, have students follow along with a written copy of the talk. Invite students to mark portions that stand out to them. You might encourage students to raise their hand when they would like to pause the video and discuss that portion of the talk. You might invite the students to look for a specific detail or the answer to a question. When video clips are not available, conference talks could be read in class.
- *Assign student reports.* Students may sign up (or be assigned) ahead of time to lead a discussion on a particular talk. Students may also be assigned to teach biographical information on the Brethren.
- *Share personal stories.* Show video clips of the Brethren sharing personal experiences. When video clips are not available, these experiences could be read in class.
- *Use group work in class.* Have students discuss, in pairs or small groups, certain aspects of a talk or specific questions related to it. Invite groups to share their discussion with the entire class.
- *Use "look for" assignments to study talks at home.* As students study conference addresses at home, have them look for key doctrines and principles, supporting scripture passages, and significant phrases or sentences. You may want to assign them to write a short paper summarizing in their own words the insights they found.
- *Have students keep a study journal.* Encourage students to record spiritual impressions before class, or provide time for this at the end of class.

- *Have students write topic summaries.* Assign students to write short compositions that incorporate the teachings of multiple speakers on a specific topic.
- *Discuss the response of the Brethren to current events.* Invite students to consider and discuss how the Brethren respond to events happening in the world today through their teachings in general conference.
- *Read talks in class.* You may want to have students read talks silently, aloud, in pairs, or in small groups. On occasion, you may also want to read part of a talk to your class if you want to emphasize a particular teaching.
- *Share stories.* Review the stories that were shared in general conference from the “Conference Story Index” located near the back of each conference issue of the *Ensign* or *Liahona*. You could have students share why a particular story was meaningful to them. Help students identify the doctrines and principles underlying the story and cross-reference each one to their scriptures.

Biographies of the Apostles

The Apostle Paul counseled, “We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you” (1 Thessalonians 5:12). You can help strengthen students’ testimonies of the prophets, seers, and revelators by sharing brief biographical information about them. You can find biographical information at newsroom.lds.org and in Church almanacs. General Authority pictures, available from the distribution center, also include biographical information on the back.

We Are Doing a Great Work and Cannot Come Down (Teacher Copy)

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf

Second Counselor in the First Presidency

Ensign or Liahona, May 2009, 59–62; italics added.



My dear brethren, I have known for a few months the message I want to give to you today. During that time, I have searched for a story that would illustrate what I want to say. I looked for a story about farming. I looked for a story about animals. In honor of Elder Scott, I looked for a story about nuclear engineering, and in honor of President Monson, one about raising pigeons.

In the end, one story kept coming back to me—a story that has been imprinted on my memory for many, many years. It isn’t about farming, animals, nuclear engineering, or pigeons. It is—as you might have guessed—about aviation. I call it “The Story of the Lightbulb.”

The Story of the Lightbulb, or Losing Sight of What Matters Most

On a dark December night 36 years ago, a Lockheed 1011 jumbo jet crashed into the Florida Everglades, killing over 100 people. This terrible accident was one of the deadliest crashes in the history of the United States.

A curious thing about this accident is that all vital parts and systems of the airplane were functioning perfectly—the plane could have easily landed safely at its destination in Miami, only 20 miles away.

During the final approach, however, the crew noticed that one green light had failed to illuminate—a light that indicates whether or not the nose landing gear has extended successfully. The pilots discontinued the approach, set the aircraft into a circling holding pattern over the pitch-black Everglades, and turned their attention toward investigating the problem.

They became so preoccupied with their search that they failed to realize the plane was gradually descending closer and closer toward the dark swamp below. By the time someone noticed what was happening, it was too late to avoid the disaster.

After the accident, investigators tried to determine the cause. The landing gear had indeed lowered properly. The plane was in perfect mechanical condition. Everything was working properly—all except one thing: a single burned-out lightbulb. That tiny bulb—worth about 20 cents—started the chain of events that ultimately led to the tragic death of over 100 people.

Of course, the malfunctioning lightbulb didn't cause the accident; it happened because the crew placed its focus on something that seemed to matter at the moment while losing sight of what mattered most.

Set Your Heart on Things That Matter Most

The tendency to focus on the insignificant at the expense of the profound happens not only to pilots but to everyone. **[Memorable phrase]** We are all at risk. The driver who focuses on the road has a far greater chance of arriving at his destination accident free than the driver who focuses on sending text messages on his phone.

We know what matters most in life—the Light of Christ teaches this to everyone. We as faithful Latter-day Saints have the Holy Ghost as a “constant companion”¹ to teach us the things of eternal value. I imagine that any priesthood holder listening to my voice today, if asked to prepare a talk on the subject “what matters most,” could and would do an excellent job. *Our weakness is in failing to align our actions with our conscience.* **[Memorable phrase]**

Pause for a moment and check where your own heart and thoughts are. Are you focused on the things that matter most? How you spend your quiet time may provide a valuable clue. Where do your thoughts go when the pressure of deadlines is gone? Are your thoughts and heart focused on those short-lived, fleeting things that matter only in the moment or on things that matter most?

[Invitation]

What grudges do you bear? What excuses do you cling to that keep you from being the kind of husband, father, son, and priesthood holder you know you should be? What are the things that distract you from your duties or hinder you from magnifying your calling more diligently?

Avoid Becoming Distracted

Sometimes the things that distract us are not bad in and of themselves; often they even make us feel good.

It is possible to take even good things to excess. **[Memorable phrase]** One example can be seen in a father or grandfather who spends hours upon hours searching for his ancestors or creating a blog while neglecting or avoiding quality or meaningful time with his own children and grandchildren. Another example could be a gardener who spends his days pulling weeds from the soil while ignoring the spiritual weeds that threaten to choke his soul.

Even some programs of the Church can become a distraction if we take them to extremes and allow them to dominate our time and our attention at the expense of things that matter most. *We need balance in life.* **[Memorable phrase]**

When we truly love our Heavenly Father and His children, we demonstrate that love through our actions. We forgive one another and seek to do good, for “*our old [self] is crucified with [Christ].*”²

[Cross-reference] We “visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction,” and we keep ourselves “unspotted from the vices of the world.”³ **[Cross-reference]**

My dear brethren of the priesthood, we live in the latter days. The gospel of Jesus Christ is restored to the earth. The keys of the priesthood of God are given again to man. We live in an era of anticipation and preparation, entrusted by God to prepare ourselves, our families, our world for the approaching dawn—the day when the Son of God will “descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God”⁴ and usher in His millennial reign.

We have been entrusted with the holy priesthood and charged with the responsibility, power, and right to act as agents of our Heavenly King.

These are the things that matter most. These are the things of eternal value that deserve our attention.

We cannot and we must not allow ourselves to get distracted from our sacred duty. We cannot and we must not lose focus on the things that matter most. **[Memorable phrase]**

Nehemiah

Nehemiah of the Old Testament is a great example of staying focused and committed to an important task. Nehemiah was an Israelite who lived in exile in Babylon and served as cupbearer to the king. One day the king asked Nehemiah why he seemed so sad. Nehemiah replied, “*Why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ [graves], lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?*”⁵ **[Cross-reference]**

When the king heard this, his heart was softened, and he gave Nehemiah the authority to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city. However, not everyone was happy with this plan. In fact, several rulers who lived near Jerusalem grieved exceedingly “*that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.*”⁶ These men “*took great indignation, and mocked the Jews.*”⁷ **[Cross-reference]**

Fearless, Nehemiah did not allow the opposition to distract him. Instead, he organized his resources and manpower and moved forward rebuilding the city, “*for the people had a mind to work.*”⁸

[Cross-reference]

But as the walls of the city began to rise, opposition intensified. Nehemiah’s enemies threatened, conspired, and ridiculed. Their threats were very real, and they grew so intimidating that Nehemiah confessed, “*They all made us afraid.*”⁹ **[Cross-reference]** In spite of the danger and the ever-present threat of invasion, the work progressed. It was a time of stress, for every builder “*had his sword girded by his side, and so builded.*”¹⁰ **[Cross-reference]**

As the work continued, Nehemiah’s enemies became more desperate. Four times they entreated him to leave the safety of the city and meet with them under the pretense of resolving the conflict, but Nehemiah knew that their intent was to do him harm. Each time they approached him, he responded with the same answer: “*I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down.*”¹¹

[Cross-reference]

What a remarkable response! With that clear and unchanging purpose of heart and mind, with that great resolve, the walls of Jerusalem rose until they were rebuilt in an astonishing 52 days.¹²

Nehemiah refused to allow distractions to prevent him from doing what the Lord wanted him to do.

[Cross-reference]

We Will Not Come Down

I am encouraged and inspired by the many faithful priesthood holders today who are of similar heart and mind. Like Nehemiah, you love the Lord and seek to magnify the priesthood you bear. The Lord loves you and is mindful of the purity of your hearts and the steadfastness of your resolve. He blesses

you for your fidelity, guides your path, and uses your gifts and talents in building His kingdom on this earth.

Nevertheless, not all are like Nehemiah. There is room for improvement.

*I wonder, my dear brethren of the priesthood, what could be accomplished if we all, like the people of Nehemiah, "had a mind to work." I wonder what could be accomplished if we "put away childish things"¹³ and gave ourselves, heart and soul, to becoming worthy priesthood bearers and true representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ. **[Invitation]***

*Think for a moment what could be accomplished in our personal lives, in our professional lives, in our families, in our wards and branches. Think of how the kingdom of God would progress throughout the earth. Imagine how the world itself could be transformed for good if every man who bears the priesthood of God were to gird up his loins and live up to his true potential, converted in the depth of his soul, a true and faithful priesthood man, committed to building the kingdom of God. **[Invitation]***

It is easy to become distracted—to become focused on one burned-out lightbulb or the impolite acts of unkind people, whatever their motive may be. But think of the power we would have as individuals and as a body of the priesthood if, in response to every temptation to lose focus or lower our standards—the standards of God—we responded, *"I am doing a great work and cannot come down."* **[Repetition]**

We live in times of great challenges and great opportunities. The Lord is seeking men like Nehemiah—faithful brethren who fulfill the oath and covenant of the priesthood. He seeks to enlist unfaltering souls who diligently go about the work of building the kingdom of God—those who, when faced with opposition and temptation, say in their hearts, *"I am doing a great work and cannot come down."* **[Repetition]**

When faced with trial and suffering, they respond, *"I am doing a great work and cannot come down."* **[Repetition]**

When faced with ridicule and reproach, they proclaim, *"I am doing a great work and cannot come down."* **[Repetition]**

Our Heavenly Father seeks those who refuse to allow the trivial to hinder them in their pursuit of the eternal. He seeks those who will not allow the attraction of ease or the traps of the adversary to distract them from the work He has given them to perform. He seeks those whose actions conform to their words—those who say with conviction, *"I am doing a great work and cannot come down."* **[Repetition]**

A Great Work to Do

I bear solemn testimony that God lives and is mindful of each one of us. He will stretch forth His hand and uphold those who rise up and bear the priesthood with honor, for in these latter days He has a great work for us to do.

This gospel does not come from man. The doctrine of the Church is not someone's best guess as to the meaning of ancient scripture. It is the truth of heaven revealed by God Himself. I testify that Joseph Smith saw what he said he saw. He truly looked into the heavens and communed with God the Father and the Son and with angels.

I bear witness that Heavenly Father speaks to those who seek Him in spirit and in truth. I have witnessed with my own eyes and joyfully testify that in our day, God speaks through His prophet, seer, and revelator, even Thomas S. Monson.

My dear brethren, like Nehemiah, we have a great work to do. We stand overlooking the horizon of our age. It is my fervent prayer that in spite of temptations, we will never lower our standards; that in spite of distractions, wherever they may come from, we will not lose focus on what matters most; that

we will stand resolute and together, shoulder to shoulder, as we valiantly bear the banner of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I pray that we may be worthy of the holy priesthood of Almighty God and, to a man, lift our heads and with unwavering voice proclaim to the world, “*We are doing a great work, and we will not come down.*” **[Repetition]** In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Doctrine and Covenants 121:46.
2. Romans 6:6.
3. Joseph Smith Translation, James 1:27.
4. 1 Thessalonians 4:16.
5. Nehemiah 2:3.
6. Nehemiah 2:10.
7. Nehemiah 4:1.
8. Nehemiah 4:6.
9. Nehemiah 6:9.
10. Nehemiah 4:18.
11. Nehemiah 6:3.
12. See Nehemiah 6:15.
13. 1 Corinthians 13:11.

We Are Doing a Great Work and Cannot Come Down (Student Copy)

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf
Second Counselor in the First Presidency
Ensign or Liahona, May 2009, 59–62.



My dear brethren, I have known for a few months the message I want to give to you today. During that time, I have searched for a story that would illustrate what I want to say. I looked for a story about farming. I looked for a story about animals. In honor of Elder Scott, I looked for a story about nuclear engineering, and in honor of President Monson, one about raising pigeons.

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On a dark December night 36 years ago, a Lockheed 1011 jumbo jet crashed into the Florida Everglades, killing over 100 people. This terrible accident was one of the deadliest crashes in the history of the United States.

A curious thing about this accident is that all vital parts and systems of the airplane were functioning perfectly—the plane could have easily landed safely at its destination in Miami, only 20 miles away.

During the final approach, however, the crew noticed that one green light had failed to illuminate—a light that indicates whether or not the nose landing gear has extended successfully. The pilots discontinued the approach, set the aircraft into a circling holding pattern over the pitch-black Everglades, and turned their attention toward investigating the problem.

They became so preoccupied with their search that they failed to realize the plane was gradually descending closer and closer toward the dark swamp below. By the time someone noticed what was happening, it was too late to avoid the disaster.

After the accident, investigators tried to determine the cause. The landing gear had indeed lowered properly. The plane was in perfect mechanical condition. Everything was working properly—all except one thing: a single burned-out lightbulb. That tiny bulb—worth about 20 cents—started the chain of events that ultimately led to the tragic death of over 100 people.

Of course, the malfunctioning lightbulb didn't cause the accident; it happened because the crew placed its focus on something that seemed to matter at the moment while losing sight of what mattered most.

Set Your Heart on Things That Matter Most

The tendency to focus on the insignificant at the expense of the profound happens not only to pilots but to everyone. We are all at risk. The driver who focuses on the road has a far greater chance of arriving at his destination accident free than the driver who focuses on sending text messages on his phone.

We know what matters most in life—the Light of Christ teaches this to everyone. We as faithful Latter-day Saints have the Holy Ghost as a “constant companion”¹ to teach us the things of eternal value. I imagine that any priesthood holder listening to my voice today, if asked to prepare a talk on the subject “what matters most,” could and would do an excellent job. Our weakness is in failing to align our actions with our conscience.

Pause for a moment and check where your own heart and thoughts are. Are you focused on the things that matter most? How you spend your quiet time may provide a valuable clue. Where do your thoughts go when the pressure of deadlines is gone? Are your thoughts and heart focused on those short-lived, fleeting things that matter only in the moment or on things that matter most?

What grudges do you bear? What excuses do you cling to that keep you from being the kind of husband, father, son, and priesthood holder you know you should be? What are the things that distract you from your duties or hinder you from magnifying your calling more diligently?

Avoid Becoming Distracted

Sometimes the things that distract us are not bad in and of themselves; often they even make us feel good.

It is possible to take even good things to excess. One example can be seen in a father or grandfather who spends hours upon hours searching for his ancestors or creating a blog while neglecting or avoiding quality or meaningful time with his own children and grandchildren. Another example could be a gardener who spends his days pulling weeds from the soil while ignoring the spiritual weeds that threaten to choke his soul.

Even some programs of the Church can become a distraction if we take them to extremes and allow them to dominate our time and our attention at the expense of things that matter most. We need balance in life.

When we truly love our Heavenly Father and His children, we demonstrate that love through our actions. We forgive one another and seek to do good, for “our old [self] is crucified with [Christ].”² We “visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction,” and we keep ourselves “unspotted from the vices of the world.”³

My dear brethren of the priesthood, we live in the latter days. The gospel of Jesus Christ is restored to the earth. The keys of the priesthood of God are given again to man. We live in an era of anticipation and preparation, entrusted by God to prepare ourselves, our families, our world for the approaching

dawn—the day when the Son of God will “descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God”⁴ and usher in His millennial reign.

We have been entrusted with the holy priesthood and charged with the responsibility, power, and right to act as agents of our Heavenly King.

These are the things that matter most. These are the things of eternal value that deserve our attention.

We cannot and we must not allow ourselves to get distracted from our sacred duty. We cannot and we must not lose focus on the things that matter most.

Nehemiah

Nehemiah of the Old Testament is a great example of staying focused and committed to an important task. Nehemiah was an Israelite who lived in exile in Babylon and served as cupbearer to the king. One day the king asked Nehemiah why he seemed so sad. Nehemiah replied, “Why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ [graves], lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?”⁵

When the king heard this, his heart was softened, and he gave Nehemiah the authority to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city. However, not everyone was happy with this plan. In fact, several rulers who lived near Jerusalem grieved exceedingly “that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.”⁶ These men “took great indignation, and mocked the Jews.”⁷

Fearless, Nehemiah did not allow the opposition to distract him. Instead, he organized his resources and manpower and moved forward rebuilding the city, “for the people had a mind to work.”⁸

But as the walls of the city began to rise, opposition intensified. Nehemiah’s enemies threatened, conspired, and ridiculed. Their threats were very real, and they grew so intimidating that Nehemiah confessed, “They all made us afraid.”⁹ In spite of the danger and the ever-present threat of invasion, the work progressed. It was a time of stress, for every builder “had his sword girded by his side, and so builded.”¹⁰

As the work continued, Nehemiah’s enemies became more desperate. Four times they entreated him to leave the safety of the city and meet with them under the pretense of resolving the conflict, but Nehemiah knew that their intent was to do him harm. Each time they approached him, he responded with the same answer: “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down.”¹¹

What a remarkable response! With that clear and unchanging purpose of heart and mind, with that great resolve, the walls of Jerusalem rose until they were rebuilt in an astonishing 52 days.¹²

Nehemiah refused to allow distractions to prevent him from doing what the Lord wanted him to do.

We Will Not Come Down

I am encouraged and inspired by the many faithful priesthood holders today who are of similar heart and mind. Like Nehemiah, you love the Lord and seek to magnify the priesthood you bear. The Lord loves you and is mindful of the purity of your hearts and the steadfastness of your resolve. He blesses you for your fidelity, guides your path, and uses your gifts and talents in building His kingdom on this earth.

Nevertheless, not all are like Nehemiah. There is room for improvement.

I wonder, my dear brethren of the priesthood, what could be accomplished if we all, like the people of Nehemiah, “had a mind to work.” I wonder what could be accomplished if we “put away childish things”¹³ and gave ourselves, heart and soul, to becoming worthy priesthood bearers and true representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Think for a moment what could be accomplished in our personal lives, in our professional lives, in our families, in our wards and branches. Think of how the kingdom of God would progress throughout the earth. Imagine how the world itself could be transformed for good if every man who bears the priesthood of God were to gird up his loins and live up to his true potential, converted in the depth of his soul, a true and faithful priesthood man, committed to building the kingdom of God.

It is easy to become distracted—to become focused on one burned-out lightbulb or the impolite acts of unkind people, whatever their motive may be. But think of the power we would have as individuals and as a body of the priesthood if, in response to every temptation to lose focus or lower our standards—the standards of God—we responded, “I am doing a great work and cannot come down.”

We live in times of great challenges and great opportunities. The Lord is seeking men like Nehemiah—faithful brethren who fulfill the oath and covenant of the priesthood. He seeks to enlist unfaltering souls who diligently go about the work of building the kingdom of God—those who, when faced with opposition and temptation, say in their hearts, “I am doing a great work and cannot come down.”

When faced with trial and suffering, they respond, “I am doing a great work and cannot come down.”

When faced with ridicule and reproach, they proclaim, “I am doing a great work and cannot come down.”

Our Heavenly Father seeks those who refuse to allow the trivial to hinder them in their pursuit of the eternal. He seeks those who will not allow the attraction of ease or the traps of the adversary to distract them from the work He has given them to perform. He seeks those whose actions conform to their words—those who say with conviction, “I am doing a great work and cannot come down.”

A Great Work to Do

I bear solemn testimony that God lives and is mindful of each one of us. He will stretch forth His hand and uphold those who rise up and bear the priesthood with honor, for in these latter days He has a great work for us to do.

This gospel does not come from man. The doctrine of the Church is not someone’s best guess as to the meaning of ancient scripture. It is the truth of heaven revealed by God Himself. I testify that Joseph Smith saw what he said he saw. He truly looked into the heavens and communed with God the Father and the Son and with angels.

I bear witness that Heavenly Father speaks to those who seek Him in spirit and in truth. I have witnessed with my own eyes and joyfully testify that in our day, God speaks through His prophet, seer, and revelator, even Thomas S. Monson.

My dear brethren, like Nehemiah, we have a great work to do. We stand overlooking the horizon of our age. It is my fervent prayer that in spite of temptations, we will never lower our standards; that in spite of distractions, wherever they may come from, we will not lose focus on what matters most; that we will stand resolute and together, shoulder to shoulder, as we valiantly bear the banner of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I pray that we may be worthy of the holy priesthood of Almighty God and, to a man, lift our heads and with unwavering voice proclaim to the world, “We are doing a great work, and we will not come down.” In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Doctrine and Covenants 121:46.
2. Romans 6:6.
3. Joseph Smith Translation, James 1:27.
4. 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

5. Nehemiah 2:3.
6. Nehemiah 2:10.
7. Nehemiah 4:1.
8. Nehemiah 4:6.
9. Nehemiah 6:9.
10. Nehemiah 4:18.
11. Nehemiah 6:3.
12. See Nehemiah 6:15.
13. 1 Corinthians 13:11.



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