

AUSTRALIA LOCAL PAGES

AREA LEADERSHIP MESSAGE

Pacific Island Stake Conference Satellite Broadcast

By Elder Quentin L. Cook

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

What a privilege to be here with you wonderful Pacific Island Saints and with Elder James J. Hamula and Sister Linda K. Burton. They have given excellent talks. It adds so much to these conferences to have the general auxiliary presidency members participate. Sister Burton is capable and spiritual. We are grateful for her service. Elder Hamula was an excellent president of the Pacific Area.

I consider it one of the great blessings of my life to have been president of the Pacific Islands Area from August 1998 to August 2001. Prior to that I was in the Philippines Area Presidency for two years and spent a good deal of time in the islands in the North Pacific. During that five-year period I met with members throughout the Pacific. I have been on most of the islands that are receiving this broadcast. The diversity and unity of the members is in my mind very impressive. The combination of Polynesian, Melanesians, Micronesian, Pakeha, and others from around the world, all united through the gospel of Jesus Christ, is inspiring.

Elder L. Tom Perry was hoping to participate in this Pacific Islands

broadcast. He is not able to be with us on this particular occasion. He asked me to send his love, best wishes, and testimony of the divinity of Jesus Christ to all of you. He organized the first stakes on both Tarawa and Guam. As a young marine, he was stationed on Saipan and other North Pacific Islands. As an Apostle, he has traveled to most of the South



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Pacific Islands. He loves and respects the Pacific Islanders.

I have fond memories of all of the islands we have visited. Traveling from Majuro to Guam and all of the islands in between was the first exposure I had to the Pacific Islands. But I subsequently visited all over the Pacific. I have had wonderful experiences.

Let me share with you a few highlight experiences I had while serving before I get to my principal message. There were hundreds of experiences from which I could choose. But each of the experiences I have chosen demonstrates a wonderful, spiritually impressive characteristic that I found among you wonderful Pacific Islands Saints. The lessons they teach are significant.

While many of you are new converts to the gospel, there are significant numbers who have been members of the Church for many generations. I remember visiting the Austral Islands. I believe it was Rurutu. A teenage girl was giving a talk and indicated that she was a seventh-generation member of the Church. All of her family had been members of the Church for over 150 years on that same island. Her ancestors were converted to the



*A Fijian girl
praying*

Church when Addison Pratt and his companions served there in the 1840s. This was before the early Saints in the US and Europe had immigrated to Salt Lake City. She was as familiar with Church history, the scriptures, and prophets and apostles of this dispensation as any knowledgeable teenager you would meet in Salt Lake City. She helped me understand that there is a pioneer heritage in your countries and throughout the South Pacific that is equal to or exceeds any that I have ever encountered.

The second experience I wish to share is from Savaii in Samoa. When I was there the national leaders were clear that Samoa respects religious freedom. However, a few of the Matai (or chiefs) in certain more remote areas took the position that ‘village customs’ allowed them to exclude Mormons. In one village a petition was being circulated among the Matai to expel the Mormons from the village. One Matai took the petition home to his wife. He explained the situation and said to his wife, “We are both elderly. We will have to face our Father in Heaven soon.” He then said, “I have always felt that the Latter-day Saint religion might be the true religion.” His wife replied that she felt the same way. They jointly decided that instead of signing the petition, they would invite the LDS missionaries to teach them and their extended family. Most of the family joined the Church. The principle this demonstrates is that many Pacific Islanders are of believing blood and are spiritually attuned to follow Jesus Christ and His restored gospel. I love the fact that the very first verse in the first section of the Doctrine and Covenants speaks specifically to the people “that are upon the islands of the sea.” In 2 Nephi 10:21 it reads, “But great are the promises of the Lord unto them who are upon the isles of the sea.” I also believe that the best is yet to come for the members in the Pacific Islands.

The third experience illustrates your willingness to sacrifice. In June of 2000 President Hinckley dedicated the Suva Fiji Temple. Sister Cook and I met him in New Caledonia previous to the flight to Fiji. He had just dedicated the Melbourne Australia Temple. One of the drivers who met us in New Caledonia was Brother Mou Thom. This family was originally from Tahiti. President Hinckley had known the family for over 40 years. When President Hinckley realized who his driver was he started to weep. Brother Mou Thom’s father had sold everything he had and then worked in the nickel mines in New Caledonia in order to save enough money to fly his family to New Zealand so they could be sealed for eternity in the newly built Hamilton New Zealand Temple. President Hinckley told us that the great faith of the island people allowed them to make exceptional sacrifices for the Lord’s kingdom. President Hinckley also shared with us his belief that one of the reasons the Lord had inspired modern prophets to build temples all over the earth is to allow members to receive the blessings of the temple without extreme hardship and sacrifice.

The fourth experience begins when our first missionaries arrived in French Polynesia in 1844. One of the most respected religious leaders was the Reverend Charles Barff of the London Missionary Society.

Our executive secretary when I was Area President was Allen Christensen. He started to search the records and ask questions to see if any of Reverend Barff's descendants were members of the Church.

He found that one of his descendants, Oscar Barff, was a member of the Church. When we asked Brother Barff about his conversion, he told how he spent 18 months studying and praying about the gospel. He then started to come to church. At a priesthood conference presided over by Elder Paletua, who was then a regional representative from Tonga, he was particularly touched by the Spirit when Elder Paletua taught, "Hands which you have previously used to hit your children are to be used to bless your children." Brother Barff was impressed, took the discussions, and joined the Church.

It is interesting that once when Sister Cook and I were in New Caledonia, I shared the above true account in a meeting. After the meeting a sister came up who was also a descendant of Reverend Barff. The next day she shared with us some family history.

In some cultures, it is not uncommon for an angry husband or wife to hit a spouse or a child. Others have endured significant verbal abuse. The proclamation on the family tells us those "who abuse spouse or offspring



Suva Fiji Temple

*Melbourne
Australia
↓ Temple*

*↑ Hamilton
New Zealand
Temple*

THE FAMILY A PROCLAMATION TO THE WORLD

THE FIRST PRESIDENCY AND COUNCIL OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES
OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

WE, THE FIRST PRESIDENCY and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children.

ALL HUMAN BEINGS—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.

IN THE PREMORTAL REALM, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshiped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize their divine destiny as heirs of eternal life. The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred covenants and covenants available to holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.

WE DECLARE the means by which mortal life is created to be divinely appointed. We affirm the sanctity of life and of its importance in God's eternal plan.

HUSBANDS AND WIVES have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children. "Children are an heritage of the Lord"

(Psalm 127:3). Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, and to teach them to love and serve one another, observe the commandments of God, and be law-abiding citizens wherever they live. Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations.

THE FAMILY is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities. By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. Disability, death, or other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation. Extended families should lend support when needed.

WE URGE that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.

WE CALL UPON responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.

This proclamation was read by President Gordon B. Hinckley as part of his message at the General Relief Society Meeting held September 23, 1995, in Salt Lake City, Utah.



Church members in Tonga

... will one day stand accountable before God.”¹

Make up your mind that regardless of whether your parents did or did not hit you, you will not hit or verbally abuse your spouse or children.

The fifth experience is one I shared in my first general conference talk as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. It is about the faith and spirituality that I found in Tonga. Sister Cook and I were in Vava'u in the Tongan Islands on one occasion. I had just spoken about following the prophet in the general session of stake conference.

At the luncheon following the conference, I sat next to a distinguished elderly patriarch. He indicated how grateful he was to hear what the prophet was teaching. He gave me the following account. Vava'u, which is a relatively small island, usually has sufficient rain, but periodically there are severe droughts. The island has long inlets or bays, almost like sounds, which curl into the island below steep hills. When drought conditions left the village without water, there was only one way they could obtain fresh water and stay alive. Over the centuries they

had found that fresh water traveled down through rock formations inside the mountains and came up in a few spots in the sea.

The Tongan men would set off in their small boats with a wise elder standing at one end of the boat looking for just the right spot. The strong young men in the boat stood ready with containers to dive deep into the seawater. When they reached the appropriate spot, the wise man would raise both arms to heaven. That was the signal. The strong young men would dive off the boat as deep as they could and fill

the containers with fresh springwater. This old patriarch likened this lifesaving tradition to the living waters of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the wise man to God's prophet here on earth. He noted that the water was pure, fresh, and, in their drought condition, lifesaving. But it was not easy to find. It was not visible to the untrained eye. This patriarch wanted to know everything the prophet and apostles were teaching.

My primary purpose is to inform you what the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve are teaching at this time. The principal prophetic priority is "Strengthening Faith in Our Heavenly Father and in Jesus Christ and His Atonement through Sabbath Day Observance at Church and in the Home." The main focus of our training for the Seventies this past conference was on the sacrament and keeping the Sabbath day holy.

I am pleased that Elder Hamula has given important instruction on these two sacred parts of our worship. Our desire and our prayer is that each member will have a special spiritual experience during the sacrament focused on Jesus Christ and the Atonement.

The final two days of the Savior's mortal ministry prior to His death on Calvary are profoundly significant and in some ways beyond comprehension. So much of what is essential

to our eternal destiny occurred on Thursday and then Friday, the day Christ was crucified. The Last Supper, a Passover supper, the "established memorial of Israel's deliverance from bondage,"² was commenced Thursday evening. Ordinances and doctrines of great significance were initiated at the Last Supper. The Savior introduced the ordinance of the sacrament. He knew His body would be broken. He took bread, blessed and broke it, and passed it to His disciples, saying, "This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). He knew His blood would be shed, so He took the cup, said a blessing of thanks, and passed it to those gathered, saying, "This cup is the new testament in my blood" (Luke 22:20), "which is shed . . . for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). In this manner the Savior instituted the sacrament.

Jesus also instituted the sacrament when he visited the Nephites.

He taught, the sacrament shall be given "unto the people of my church,

unto all those who shall believe and be baptized in my name. . . .

". . . This is fulfilling my commandments, and this doth witness unto the Father that ye are willing to do that which I have commanded you.

". . . And if ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you" (3 Nephi 18:5, 10, 11).

In this dispensation the sacrament prayers contain principles that are essential as we focus on the ordinance of the sacrament (see D&C 20:77–79).

First, we partake of the sacrament in remembrance of the body and blood of the Son. Second, we witness unto God the Eternal Father that we are willing to take upon us the name of His Son and always remember Him. Beyond renewing our covenants, we are also committing to keep His commandments. Third, the sacrament service should be a spiritual experience inspiring us to remember Him, keep His commandments, and have His Spirit to be with us.



The Savior introduced the ordinance of the sacrament.

In order to make the sacrament meeting a more spiritual experience, there are three additional principles that we are emphasizing.

First, where possible, consideration should be given to holding sacrament meeting first in the meeting schedule. Children and families will come prepared to reverently worship our Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Second, while the bishop holds the priesthood keys to direct the work of the Church within his ward boundaries, he does so primarily through the ward council. One way the bishop can improve the spirituality of the entire ward is to use the ward council more effectively. The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve want sacrament meeting programs to be planned one month in advance and formalized in the ward council rather than only in the bishopric meeting. Planning this way will be enhanced with input from the sisters and priesthood leaders who

are members of the council. This will greatly strengthen the spiritual experience that should be provided in every sacrament meeting.

Third, unnecessary administrative matters such as announcements and anything else that detracts from the Spirit should not be done in the sacrament meeting.

Fourth, we are concerned that stake presidencies, bishoprics, auxiliary leaders, and many other faithful members are overburdened both on the Sabbath and during the week. We make no specific recommendation about how your responsibilities can be fulfilled. However, we encourage you to simplify wherever possible. You can accomplish this through organization, delegation (primarily through ward councils), and having only one member of a presidency or bishopric attend certain activities. The goal is to use time wisely. As section 3.3.3 of *Handbook 2* reads, “In some wards, leaders rely

repeatedly on a small group of people to give service in priesthood and auxiliary organizations. This can overburden the faithful few.”³ We encourage you to review chapter 17 of *Handbook 2* on “Uniformity and Adaptation” for suggestions on simplification.

I remember with great appreciation the counsel Elder L. Tom Perry gave in 1975 when I was first called as a counselor in a stake presidency. He was reorganizing several stakes, and he taught the new stake presidencies and the members the importance of an appropriate balance between family, work, and Church responsibilities. He said before his call as a General Authority he was president of the Boston Stake, and he described his schedule.

He taught that on Monday evenings his family faithfully held family home evening. On Tuesday and Wednesday evenings he fulfilled his obligation to his employer, where he served as a top executive and controller. Thursday evening was reserved for his stake leadership responsibilities. Friday was reserved on his calendar for spending the evening with his wife. She could confidently schedule activities for them on that night. During the day on Saturday he attempted to spend time with his children in something that was non-Church related. Sometimes it was working around the house, a sport event in which they were engaged, or



Church members in Samoa



an activity with the family. Saturday evening he organized and prepared for his Sunday responsibilities to make them as spiritual as possible. He made considerable effort to get home early enough on the Sabbath to spend some precious time honoring the Sabbath with his family.

All of us who were called at that time did our very best to follow his counsel. It was a great blessing to us, but it also set an example for all of the other leaders in the area. The combination of serving in our sacred callings, not neglecting our families, and not neglecting our employers helped keep our lives in balance. We were all grateful to Elder Perry.

In 4.6.3 we are instructed to be “careful to avoid overburdening individuals

and families (see Mosiah 4:27; D&C 10:4). Each member’s first priority is to his or her family.” We should ensure “an appropriate balance between the member’s family obligations and his or her responsibilities in the Church.”⁴

I have studied the scriptures and prayerfully pondered about the spiritual experience we hope members will have through Sabbath day observance at church. I was deeply touched by how the Savior instituted the sacrament amongst the Nephites. You will recall that this occurred immediately following the incredible spiritual ministering that is recorded in chapter 17 of 3 Nephi. The Savior indicated that He was “commanded of the Father to speak unto [them]” (verse 2). “They were in tears, and did look steadfastly

upon him” (verse 5). He said, “My bowels are filled with compassion towards you . . . [and] are filled with mercy” (verses 6, 7). He healed their sick. They bowed down “at his feet and did worship him”; they literally bathed “his feet with their tears” (verse 10).

And then, in what may be the most tender account in all scripture, “he commanded that their little children should be brought” and that “the multitude . . . should kneel down upon the ground” (verses 11, 13). Then He “groaned within himself, and said: Father, I am troubled because of the wickedness of the people of the house of Israel” (verse 14). This sounds like the world we live in today. The account then reads, “He . . . knelt upon the earth; and behold he prayed

unto the Father, and the things which he prayed cannot be written” (verse 15). The record continues, “Eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father; . . . no one can conceive of the joy which filled our souls at the time we heard him pray for us unto the Father” (verses 16, 17). Subsequently, He said, “Blessed are ye because of your faith. And now behold, my joy is full” (verse 20).

“And when he had said these words, he wept, and the multitude bare record of it, and he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them.

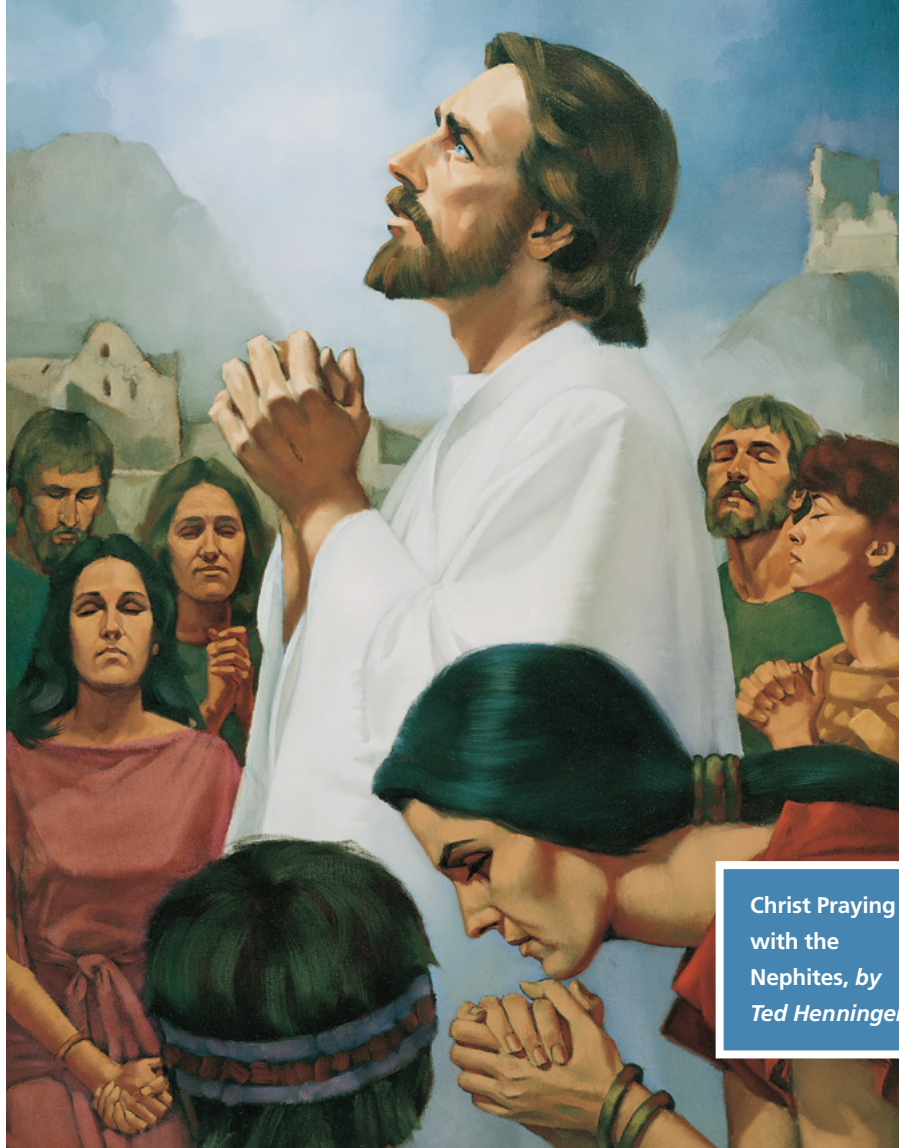
“And when he had done this he wept again” (verses 21–22).

He asked them to behold their little ones (see verse 23).

“And they saw the heavens open, and they saw angels descending out of heaven as it were in the midst of fire; . . . and the angels did minister unto them.

“And the multitude did see and hear and bear record” that this is true (verses 24–25).

Brothers and sisters, the Savior, in Jerusalem, with complete understanding of what He would face to achieve the Atonement—the broken body and the shedding of blood—commenced the ordinance of the sacrament with His Apostles. After His Ascension, He



Christ Praying with the Nephites, by Ted Henninger

visited the Nephites (the other sheep). One emphasis in that chapter stands out: He *groaned*. He was troubled because of the wickedness of the people of the house of Israel. He had witnessed it in Jerusalem and among the Nephites. But under commandment of His Father and with bowels filled with mercy and compassion, He blessed and healed everyone and wept over precious children. Then He once again taught the sacred ordinance of the sacrament, this time among the Nephites (see 3 Nephi 18).

Brother and sisters, can you help us give back the sacrament meeting to the Savior? Our prayer and our hope is that the same feelings that emanate

from these scriptures can be captured across the Church in sacrament meetings where we rejoice and worship God the Father and Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer.

As one of His Apostles, I bear solemn witness of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and the significance and sacredness of the sacrament. I testify of the reality of the Atonement and the Savior’s divinity. I know He lives. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.
2. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 3rd ed. (1916), 594.
3. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 3.3.3.
4. *Handbook 2*, 4.6.3.