

AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

Keep It Simple

By **Elder Carl B. Cook**

President of the Africa Southeast Area



Elder Carl B. Cook

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles currently represents the Council of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve in supervising the growth and establishment of the Church in Africa. Elder Bednar's teachings significantly influence me as a member of the Area Presidency, as well as me personally.

Elder Bednar continually emphasizes the importance of keeping things simple. After he dedicated the country of Gabon for the preaching of the gospel, he met with a small group of pioneers. They would be instrumental in establishing the Church in that country of approximately 1.7 million people. His advice to them was

straightforward: "If you start right and keep it simple, you will stay right" (meeting in Gabon, Nov. 5, 2013).

I have repeated that message many times in many situations. However, when I try to apply it in my own life, I find that it can be a very complex process to keep things simple. Perhaps it is human nature to overcomplicate things. We can be particularly susceptible to this as members of the Church. When trying to accomplish objectives or solve problems, we tend to add more activities, more initiatives, more guidelines, more programs—more busyness. In reality, the most effective way to achieve worthwhile goals is to keep things simple and follow the basic

inspired principles revealed by God. Sometimes "less" is "more."

I admire one man's determination to keep things simple in spite of people who tried to overcomplicate his life. Cliff Young was a 61-year-old farmer who won the world's toughest endurance race by relying on tried-and-true methods and by keeping things simple. Cliff and his family had 2,000 sheep on 2,000 acres. They were farmers who couldn't afford tractors or horses. When storms rolled in, Cliff had to go out and round up the sheep on foot. He said, "Sometimes I would have to run those sheep for two or three days. It took a long time, but I'd always catch them" (elitefeet.com/the-legend-of-cliff-young).



Elder David A. Bednar and Sister Susan Bednar with Area President Carl B. Cook the day of the dedication of the country of Gabon in Africa



A group of Saints gathered in Gabon the day of the dedication



Elder David A. Bednar and Brother Armand Jean Claude Mpandue who served as the first branch president in Gabon (9-Dec-12 to 5-April-15)

When Cliff heard about the 5-day, 543.7-mile (875 km) ultra-marathon race between Sydney and Melbourne, Australia, he felt he could run the race. The day of the race, he presented himself at the registration table wearing overalls and work boots, amidst many world-class athletes half his age dressed in specialized athletic gear and shoes.

Many people thought Cliff's training methods were crazy. Some people were concerned about his health and safety, and they didn't think Cliff should participate in the race. Cliff ran with an unusual shuffle that elicited ridicule from onlookers. But Cliff ignored the doubters and ran the race. Initially he trailed all of the other runners. However, when others slept for 5 to 6 hours per day, Cliff shuffled onward without sleep. He drew strength from pretending that he was searching for sheep and trying to outrun a storm. Each day he progressed, and he eventually won the race by 10 hours, setting a new course record.

Other ultra-marathon runners began adopting Cliff's unusual running style and it became known as the "Young-shuffle." In addition, most runners now follow Cliff's example and no longer sleep during the race. (See "The Race of Life," *Church News*, Oct. 30, 2010).

Similar to how Cliff adhered to his tried-and-true methods in spite of what was happening around him, it is important for each of us to keep



It is important for each of us to keep our lives grounded in what is most important—the gospel of Jesus Christ.

our lives grounded in what is most important—the gospel of Jesus Christ. We can't let the things of men or the things of the world distract us from our core beliefs. We must stay focused on the things that bring peace, joy, and success in life.

I invite each of us to evaluate whether there are things that may be overcomplicating our lives and distracting us from the things that are most important. It may be time to reestablish priorities, get rid of the things that encroach upon our time, and get back to the basics. Perhaps it is time to simplify our lives.

It may be helpful to ask ourselves, "Are gospel truths at the center of our lives? Do gospel principles govern our

use of time, energy, and resources—as individuals, as families, and as members of the Church?"

If our lives are not focused on these truths, what can we do to change? We can apply simple gospel principles. We can exercise faith and pray, study the scriptures, keep the Sabbath day holy, and worship God. We can repent and do our best to obey the commandments and follow the counsel of our prophets. We can faithfully fulfil our callings in the Church. We can focus our time and energy on becoming more like our Savior.

Though these are simple concepts, they can provide a framework for prioritizing our lives. And as we focus on the most important things in life, we can receive profound blessings. We are reminded repeatedly in the Book of Mormon, "Inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land" (Alma 36:1). We are also taught, "By small and simple things are great things brought to pass" (Alma 37:6).

It may be challenging to simplify our lives, but it is not impossible. Heavenly Father can guide us and bless our efforts as we look to Him with faith and commitment and set aside the things of the world. We can receive strength through Jesus Christ and His Atonement. He has suffered all things and understands our challenges. I know we can receive help on a daily basis to start right, keep it simple, and stay right. ■

LOCAL PRIESTHOOD LEADERS

Read, Study, and Ponder the Scriptures

By Elder Alfred K. Kyungu

Elder Alfred K.
Kyungu

In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we know that the scriptures consist of four standard works, and all words spoken, “as . . . moved upon by the Holy Ghost” “unto all those who were ordained unto this priesthood” (D&C 68:2, 3). It is therefore important for some to acquire the habit and for others to continue reading, studying, and pondering the scriptures because there is a great benefit and blessings for our progression.

President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, explained the difference between reading, studying, and pondering. He said: “Our humility and our faith that invite spiritual gifts are increased by our reading, studying, and pondering the scriptures. . . .

Henry B.
Eyring

ing are not the same. We read words and we may get ideas. We study and we may discover patterns and connections in scripture. But when we ponder, we invite

revelation by the Spirit. Pondering, to me, is the thinking and the praying I do after reading and studying in the scriptures carefully” (“Serve with the Spirit,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 60).

In the early years of the Church in 1832, the Prophet Joseph Smith urged everyone to search the scriptures in order to gain knowledge of God and not to be dependent on man. He said: “Search the scriptures. . . . You will then know for yourselves and not for another. . . .” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 11–12).

First, we understand that the scriptures are the Lord’s voice. President Howard W. Hunter (1907–95) taught that “God’s will has been revealed in the scriptures, and for this reason we have been commanded to read them to find the truth” (*Teaching of*

Howard W.
Hunter

Presidents of the Church: Howard W. Hunter [2015], 145). Sometimes we are embarrassed and do not know what to do, but the scriptures help

us to distinguish truth from error. “Feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:3).

Then we understand that the scriptures are a guide and a lamp unto our feet. “Let the scriptures be your guide, and you will never find yourself traveling the road to nowhere” (*Teachings of Thomas S. Monson* [2011], 275). These scriptures are the only guides and means by which we can measure the truth and doctrine and know whether they are of Christ. “I promise you . . . that if you will study the scriptures diligently, your power to avoid temptation and to receive direction of the Holy Ghost in all you do will be increased” (Thomas S. Monson, “Be Your Best Self,” *Liahona*, May 2009, 68). “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Joshua 1:8).

Finally, we understand that the scriptures are lights and answers to our questions. “If we will energetically pursue this worthy personal goal [to study the scriptures] in a determined and conscientious manner, we shall

indeed find answers to our problems and peace in our hearts” (*Teaching of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* [2006], 66). Pondering invites the Light of Christ. As the prophet Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918) said: “As I pondered over these things which are written, the eyes of my understanding were opened, and the Spirit of the Lord rested upon me . . .” (D&C 138:11).

Through pondering the scriptures, Joseph Smith received an answer to his prayer, and that opened the door to the First Vision and the great work of the Restoration. “[The scriptures] expand our memory in another sense by teaching us about epochs, people, and events that we did not experience personally” (D. Todd Christofferson, “The Blessing of Scripture,” *Liahona*, May 2010, 33).

This invitation to read, study, and ponder the scriptures concerns everyone. No one is excluded. In this regard, President Monson taught this: “The



**Spencer W.
Kimball**

holy scriptures are for children, to fill their eager minds with sacred truth. They are for youth, to prepare them for the challenges of our fast-moving world. They

are for the sisters, remembering President Spencer W. Kimball’s advice: “We want our sisters to be scholars of the scriptures as well as our men” (*Ensign*, Nov. 1978, 102). They are for the brethren of the priesthood, that each may qualify for the description given in the Book of Mormon to the sons of Mosiah: “. . . they were men of a sound understanding and they had searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God . . .” (Alma 17:2) (*Teachings of Thomas S. Monson*, 274).

“We should not be haphazard in our reading but rather develop a systematic plan for study. . . . It is better to have a set amount of time to give scriptural study each day than to have a set amount of chapters to read” (*Teachings: Howard W. Hunter*, 149). That time can be in the evening after a busy day to receive strength and comfort, or very early in the morning when you have forgotten the worries of the past day.

I conclude by quoting President Thomas S. Monson: “I reiterate what we have been told repeatedly—that in order to gain and keep the faith we need, it is essential that we read and study and ponder the scriptures” (“Be an Example and a Light,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2015, 87).

I testify that the best way to avoid the evils of this world is to nourish our spirit with truth and righteousness contained in the scriptures. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■



LOCAL NEWS

“Please Take Hold of My Hand”

By Name withheld

My battle with cancer began 18 years ago when I was diagnosed with a malignant growth in my left kidney. Plans were made for removal of the infected kidney, our bishop asked ward members to fast for me, and I was given a priesthood blessing.

When I was being prepared for surgery, my doctor gave me an analysis of what lay ahead. I told him about my blessing and he gave me an undertaking that before he removed the kidney, he would assess the situation carefully and if a miracle had been performed on my behalf, he would not proceed with the operation. Having received that assurance, I was wheeled into the operating room.

When I awoke and found myself surrounded by medical equipment, I knew that my kidney had been removed. I felt at peace; God had made His decision and I accepted what had happened. Days later I awoke one morning with a feeling of impending doom. My wife arrived later with the news that my mother had died.

The prognosis was that I would need two months of recuperation before returning to work. I could literally not put one foot in front of another—the task was too painful and physically impossible. My priesthood blessing came to my rescue, for within three weeks I was back at work. Attention

now moved to my bladder. Every six months for the following five years, I returned to the hospital to remove signs of infection. When it became evident that we were fighting a losing battle, the bladder was removed.

I feel that I have borne my trials with great resignation. Nobody but my immediate family knew my true situation. I was never one to burden others with my tale of woe. Friends have attested to this, saying that I never complain and always have a happy disposition. I have this legacy of pain in my left side where the operation was performed. Thankfully it does not inhibit me from experiencing a happy and fulfilling life.

However, I have had my personal struggles, unseen by anyone except God. One night during all these trials,



“My brothers and sisters, we are surrounded by those in need of our attention, our encourage-

ment, our support, our comfort, our kindness—be they family members, friends, acquaintances, or strangers. We are the Lord’s hands here upon the earth, with the mandate to serve and to lift His children. He is dependent upon each of us.”

—Thomas S. Monson, “What Have I Done for Someone Today?” *Liahona*, Nov. 2009, 86.

I felt very depressed and forsaken. I felt that God had forgotten me, and I wanted assurance that He was still mindful of me. While I was recuperating from surgery, I chose to be in a separate bedroom from my wife so that she could sleep peacefully from the exertion of caring for me.

On that particular night, filled with these feelings of depression, I decided to pray and ask God for a special blessing. I told Him that I would hold my hand up in the air,



God . . . loves us and is mindful of us and what we are going through.

and I asked that He would please take hold of it in a token that He was still mindful of me. I rested my elbow on the bed for support, lifted my lower arm and hand into the air, and fell into a state of semiconsciousness.

After a short time, to my great joy, I realized that someone was holding my hand. I awoke and looked in expectation of seeing some heavenly being but saw instead my dear wife, who had been awakened with the

distinct impression that I needed her. I am not sure why she took hold of my hand, the exact blessing which I had prayed for.

Later I came to understand more fully how God interacts with us, His children. He often answers our prayers through others. It is not always necessary to send a heavenly messenger for that purpose. He loves us and is mindful of us and what we are going through. ■

has been a dear friend. Approximately 3,600 missionaries have served during the nine mission presidents' tenures with whom she has served. When asked which presidency she has enjoyed the most, she replied, "I have loved them all!" And they have loved her.

Thirsly was not a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for the first few years that she worked at the mission home. Her first exposure to the Church came when she worked for the Withers family and watched them embrace the gospel. After they joined the Church, she observed a wonderful difference in the way they treated each other and their children. They were the family who referred her to the mission home for employment.

"After working there for a few years and being around all the young missionaries, their spirit was contagious," she said. "Some of the presidents and their wives would invite me for scripture study with them in the mornings, and they would even invite me to some of their trainings. Then one day the Apostle Elder M. Russell Ballard came for a mission visit. He put his hand on my shoulder and asked me if I would like to be a member of the Church, and I said, yes! While I was being taught by the missionaries, all of my questions were answered, especially about the people who had died before embracing the gospel and getting to know

A Modern-day Hannah

Sister Fikiswa Thirsly Motolwana has been anxiously awaiting her son Cebo's mission call. Before he was even born she started fasting and praying to Heavenly Father for a son. In her prayers she promised that if He would grant her a son she would join the LDS Church and her son would serve Him and be obedient to the commandments all of his

days, just like the biblical story of Hannah.

For 25 years, Sister Thirsly has been the personal assistant to the mission presidents and their wives in the South Africa Cape Town Mission Home. She serves as housekeeper, event planner, florist, gardener, laundress, chef, baker, and anything else that is asked of her. But mostly she

***Thirsly and Cebo:
Thirsly prayed for a
son and promised the
Lord that she would
raise him to be a con-
secrated servant.***



Jesus Christ. I knew there must be a way for them to be saved, and now I know there is—it is the temple” (see 1 Peter 3:18–19; 4:6).

Thirsly was baptized on March 30, 1997, by President Marcus, who was the mission president. In her patriarchal blessing she was told of her special gift for loving children. She has enjoyed many years of service in the Primary organization. Also in

Relief Society, she has taught other mothers the values to teach their children. She was endowed in the Johannesburg South Africa Temple on December 3, 1999.

Thirsly’s son, Cebo, has enjoyed coming to the South Africa Cape Town Mission Home since he was a tiny baby tied on his mother’s back while she worked. All through his growing-up years he has had many

wonderful examples of missionaries who have served in that area. The last few years he has enjoyed teaching with the elders as they fellowship others. Elder Cebo Tshetu has now been called to serve in the Madagascar Antananarivo Mission, French and Malagasy speaking. Just as Thirsly promised the Lord many years ago, he will now going forward as a consecrated servant. ■

Have Miracles Ceased?

By C. Terry and Susan L. Warner

An elderly gentleman, more than 80 years old, came to the Ghana Accra Temple in Africa with a group of Saints from his hometown. They were to spend two day serving in the temple. He sat on a bench inside the men’s dressing room in the temple, waiting to do initiatory ordinances. In a few minutes another man, 54 years old, came and sat down next to him. The younger man had planned to attend the endowment session that morning with his wife and the other members of his ward, but had arrived in the temple too late. He decided to do initiatory ordinances instead.

The older man asked the younger one where he was from.

“Sekondi,” came the answer.

“Where in Sekondi?” the elder one asked.

“In Ketan.”

“What part of Ketan?”

“Where the public schools are.”

“I have children living there,” the older man said.

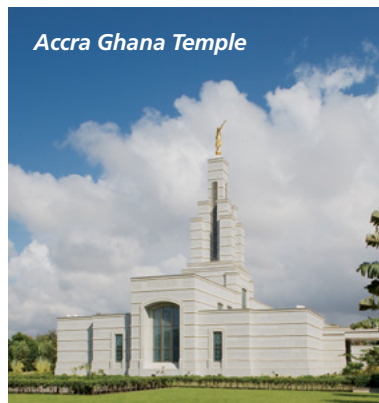
With a growing sense of recognition, the younger one looked at him intently and said, “You are my father.” Just then an ordinance worker approached to invite the elderly man into the initiatory

booth. About 15 minutes later, when he had completed the ordinance work, the older man returned and immediately asked, “What is your name?”

“John Ekow-Mensah,” the younger man said.

“That is my name, too. You are my son.”

The younger John had been named after both his father and his grandfather. When the boy was very young, his parents’ marriage had been dissolved and the father had left. The boy was four or five years old at that time. He



Accra Ghana Temple



John Ekow-Mensah and his father were miraculously reunited in the Ghana Temple after being separated for many years.

CALL FOR ARTICLES

Your local pages section is produced by members in your own area under the guidance of the Area Presidency so that it can address the needs and experiences of members where you live. The inclusion of the local pages in each issue depends on the availability of local content. We invite you to contribute your faith-promoting thoughts and experiences by contacting your local editor. ■

and his three younger sisters were raised by his mother and her family. John never saw his father again until that day in 2012, in the temple.

When the younger John married, he and his wife decided to find a church that they could join together. John was away at university when he saw a *Liahona* magazine on a shelf. He found himself interested in what it had to say and noticed the name of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as the publisher.

When John came home from school, his wife was anxious to tell him of a church she had learned about from one of her friends. She said it was called The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. John told her that this was the church he had read about in a magazine at the university. He and his wife, Deborah, were taught the gospel and baptized in 1999.

Unknown to the younger John, his father had made his living mostly as a painter. He met a woman who was living in a building he was painting. She was a member of the Church and introduced him to the gospel. He was baptized in 1991.

Though their paths in life had separated, the father and son had both found the gospel. Twenty-one years after the father's baptism and 13 years after the son's, they were reunited in a miraculous meeting in the temple. After that encounter, they went on

a temple session and then sat in the celestial room together, reconnected their lives, and rekindled their love.

John wondered why his father had left his family, and why he hadn't tried to get back with or at least contact them. His father explained to him what had happened. Among their tribe, the oldest matriarch held sovereign power. Whatever she required, everyone in the larger family was compelled to do. In this case, that matriarch was the grandmother of the elder John's wife, and she was violently opposed to his marriage to her granddaughter. It was her insistence that forced separation upon this couple, and made it hopeless for John to attempt continued contact with his family. In that culture, expulsion from the family severed all ties.

The gospel brought them back together after almost a lifetime apart. What better place to rediscover each other than in the Lord's house where families can be joined for eternity? Surely the Lord's hand was over this miraculous meeting as they both came to the temple at the same time and sat side by side. ■

EDITOR'S NOTE

The Africa Southeast Area has a website that publishes messages from the Area Presidency as well as inspirational stories from members in Africa. Please visit us at africase.lds.org. ■



Scriptures Now Available in Additional African Languages

The scriptures are available to purchase from the Distribution Centre in Xhosa and Zulu. The Centre is located at 5a Jubilee Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, South Africa.

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