

## AREA LEADERSHIP MESSAGE

### The Covenant Path

By Elder Robert J. Dudfield

Area Seventy

As a young man, I was very active in the Scouting program and was grateful to have earned my Queen Scout Award. My final major project to qualify for the award was to lead a group across the Overland Track in the middle of Tasmania over six days. Mixed with rugged and at times challenging terrain, the view from the various peaks along the track was simply majestic and well worth the effort.

Partway through our journey late one afternoon, it began to rain heavily, and the outlook from the skies warned us that the weather was closing in quickly. As the person leading the group, I reviewed the nearest safe site to walk to, consulted with the team and agreed on our course of action. We left the main path and made our way up to safe ground to camp for the night.

During the night it rained harder than I can ever recall in my life, and by morning everything around us was flooded. Our safe track back out to the main path had washed away, and we were left in a predicament. I recall finding a quiet place, kneeling and praying for guidance from Heavenly Father. The answer was both clear and instructive. I was to prepare a way back to the main path along the ridge

through heavy bushes and scrub. If I remained on course and didn't deviate from the instruction I received, we would eventually make our way back to safety on the main path.

We proceeded with faith. The trek through the bush was tiring, challenging and confronting. After a lot of effort (and a few silent prayers), we made our way out to the opening where we could see the path in the distance. The feeling of gratitude and peace is one that I will never forget.

Our final hurdle was to cross a flooded river that we had previously crossed the afternoon before. There was a log and a thin wire that we could hold on to for balance. It was easy crossing it the day before because

the river had not flooded. Making our way back over the flooded river with the log covered with rushing water proved much more challenging.

One by one we crossed the river, holding tight to the wire to provide us with the support we needed, coupled by encouragement from each member of the team. Finally we all made it, and were back on the path that led us safely on our way. The "iron rod" that we held tight to delivered us from danger.

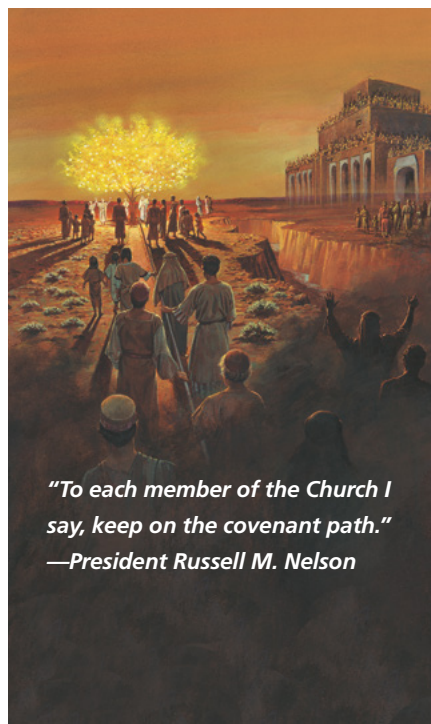
Over the years I have reflected on the lessons learned through this experience. There are too many to list; however, here are a few:

- Heavenly Father will never lead us astray, because He hears and answers our prayers.
- As we trust Him, we can be confident that He will guide us.
- The way back to safety may be difficult, but as we trust Him we can make it with His help.
- Holding tight to the iron rod will lead us on the path back to Him.

In his first message to the members of the Church as prophet in January, President Russell M. Nelson made the following petition and promise. He stated: "To each member of the Church I say, keep on the covenant path. Your commitment to follow the



Robert J. Dudfield



*"To each member of the Church I say, keep on the covenant path."  
—President Russell M. Nelson*

## A Second Chance at Happiness

By Shilo Kino

Three years ago, Tum Puhi found himself “in the depths of misery”. He was in a prison cell and had no contact with his two children from a previous relationship—Sirron, 11, and Tehya, 9.

“I was in a position where I couldn’t feel my heart or soul. I was rotting away inside,” he said. “Bombarded with all my sins and wrongs, I said to myself, ‘How am I going to get out of here?’ Not out of prison itself but the darkness I was in.”



**Tum and Emily were married in the Hamilton New Zealand Temple in August 2016.**

Savior by making covenants with Him and then keeping those covenants will open the door to every spiritual blessing and privilege available to men, women, and children everywhere.”

He continued:

“The end for which each of us strives is to be endowed with power in a house of the Lord, sealed as families, faithful to covenants made in a temple that qualify us for the greatest gift of God—that of eternal life. . . .

“Now, if you have stepped off the path, may I invite you with all the hope in my heart to please come back. Whatever your concerns, whatever your challenges, there is a place for you in this, the Lord’s Church. You and generations yet unborn will be blessed by your actions now to return to the covenant path. Our Father in Heaven cherishes His children, and He wants each of us to return home to Him. This is a grand goal of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—to help each of us to come back home.”<sup>1</sup>

We learn much about the covenant path from the account of Lehi’s dream in the Book of Mormon, in 1 Nephi chapter 8. Here we learn about many significant elements of the dream,<sup>2</sup> but the iron rod and the fruit-filled tree really stand out to me. The iron rod that Lehi described symbolises the covenant path that President Nelson spoke about.

Elder David A. Bednar observed:

“An individual can obtain the path that leads to the tree and the fruit only

by entering through the gate—even the ordinances of baptism . . . and [receiving] the gift of the Holy Ghost. . . .

“Pressing forward to and partaking of the fruit of the tree may represent the receiving of additional ordinances and covenants whereby the Savior’s Atonement can become fully efficacious in our lives.”<sup>3</sup>

The fruit is symbolic of the blessings of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, but to access all the blessings of His Atonement, we need to walk along the covenant path in order to reach the tree. Is it any wonder that only when Lehi reached the tree and partook of the fruit did he gain a glimpse of the eternal nature and blessings for his family? With this insight it became his greatest desire for each of them to partake of the fruit, or, in other words, to walk the covenant path.

I bear my witness that steady and sustained progress along the covenant path to the tree is the course that is prepared for each of us. It will be filled with trials and challenges. However, as Elder Bednar taught in October 2016 general conference, “Tasting the fruit of the tree and becoming deeply ‘converted unto the Lord’ [Alma 23:6] are the blessings He yearns for us to receive.”<sup>4</sup> ■

### NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, “As We Go Forward Together,” *Ensign*, Apr. 2018, 7.
2. See 1 Nephi 8:10–20.
3. David A. Bednar, *One by One* (2017), 92–93.
4. David A. Bednar, “If Ye Had Known Me,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2016, 104.



***Tum converted to the Church after having a powerful experience in prison.***

After much contemplation, he heard a still, small voice that whispered, “Pray, pray, pray.”

Tum started to pray daily and felt good after every prayer. After two weeks of praying, he was released from prison on electronically monitored bail.

“Praying was my only hope as I was battling with depression, anxiety, and a broken heart, so I continued to pray daily even when I was locked up at home,” he said. “One night as I prayed, I felt the love of the Lord descend on me. I felt I was being hugged and wrapped around His cloak. This experience carried on every night. I would even open a prayer and say nothing just to feel His love and take away the pain.”

Two weeks into this experience, missionaries showed up at his house. “I looked at them (the missionaries) and said, ‘Do you think you can help me?’ They gave me a big smile and promised me that they can.”

The missionaries were at Tum’s house every day for the next year, teaching him the gospel of Jesus Christ. Tum read the Book of Mormon from cover to cover three times. That’s

when life started changing for him.

“I got to know the Lord beyond measure. Through the Book of Mormon’s spiritual power, I gained a conversion and testimony that is unwavering.”

Tum was released from bail and was baptized on 18 April 2015. His children started to gain their own testimonies too and learned how to pray. “My children started praying that I’ll find a wife and it brought me to tears. They prayed every night until she came.”

Emily, originally from Makati City, Philippines, moved to New Zealand in 2011. She has a son from a previous relationship called Alex, 11. Tum and Emily met at a mid-singles family home evening in Auckland. After overcoming trials and healing from a failed relationship, Emily had given up on dating. She had decided to devote her life to motherhood and service. That was until she met Tum, a recent convert to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

“The first time I saw him I thought he was the most handsome Maori I have ever seen,” she said. However, it was his strength in faith and

conversion that amazed Emily. “When you meet Tum and hear his testimony, you’ll know that the Atonement of Jesus Christ is real,” she said. “It’s not a superficial change. The strength of his testimony carries our whole family. His change of heart and how Heavenly Father sees him, that’s who I saw. He is everything I imagined him to be.”

Little did she know that his eyes were already set on her. He asked her on a date, and the couple began their relationship a few months after their first meeting. Both Tum and Emily’s children immediately became best friends.

They both decided early on that temple marriage was their goal. “Since growing up that’s always been my goal, and since he met the missionaries he’s done everything he could to obtain it,” she said. “We worked hard to stay clean and pure, so we could obtain temple blessings.”

Tum, 31, and Emily, 33, were eventually married in the Hamilton New Zealand Temple in August 2016.

“When you embrace the gospel, the Lord paves the way,” Tum said. “Marriage is beautiful, but a temple marriage is one you can’t give up on. You learn to forgive each other quickly because you understand the principles of the gospel.”

The Puhi family are currently based in Tum’s hometown of Huntly. Tum is the ward mission leader and Emily is a ward missionary in the Huntly Ward.



Marriage is “bliss,” Emily said. “It’s a beautiful story, but we have weaknesses that we work on together. The peace and joy we obtained from temple marriage is beyond compare.”

Tum and Emily have seen many blessings from temple marriage, including miracles that led them to buying their first home in Huntly and Emily being given permission to work from home, as her office is based in North Shore.

Tum concludes, “I know that when the desires in our heart are in line with Heavenly Father’s, He will place before you all that you need. I love this gospel. It has purified me and brought me nearer to my Father in Heaven and our Saviour, Jesus Christ, whom I dearly love. I know this gospel is true and the Book of Mormon is the most powerful book on earth. The principles of this gospel will carry us into heaven. Learn it, live it, and love it.” ■

“It really struck me hard, I didn’t want to lose her,” she said. “I was praying, and nothing seemed to be working. I didn’t know what to do.”

She started noticing a Latter-day Saint chapel every time she took her daughter to her orthodontist appointment.

And then she said her cousin Teresa from New Plymouth, New Zealand, started posting Church videos and articles on her Facebook page. “They were uplifting,” she said. “I remember feeling that Heavenly Father was here for me. I started talking to Teresa and she sent the missionaries over.”

Teresa is a big fan of Facebook, using it as a tool to connect with family around the world. She is passionate about sharing the gospel online, after hearing a talk from an Apostle. “There’s so many wrong things shared on social media, and I just want to share the truth.”

Teresa noticed Andrea was “liking” a lot of the Church content she was posting. “I had an impression come

## Sharing the Gospel Online

By Shilo Kino

Teresa Jansje Marshall didn’t think twice when she posted a Church video on her Facebook page. She had no idea it was about to change the life of someone halfway across the world.

That someone was Andrea Demchy-Cooper, who was born in New Zealand but is now living in

Heathrow, London. Andrea was not a member of the Church at the time, although she has fond memories as a child of going to church with her grandma. It was also at this time that Andrea had just found out a beloved childhood friend was diagnosed with breast cancer.

SUPPLIED



*Andrea (second from right) was baptised after her cousin Teresa shared Church videos on her Facebook page.*

*◆ Teresa is a big fan of Facebook and uses it as a tool to share the gospel with her friends and family.*



SUPPLIED

to my mind that said, "Thank you for being Andrea's friend. Please share the gospel with her." I pondered on how I could do that, and I just started sharing more content aimed at Andrea."

Teresa then asked Andrea if she already attended a church. She was shocked when Andrea told her no but that she wanted to go to the Mormon church.

"I was completely gobsmacked, and I think I started crying. It was behind the computer, so she didn't see me. I asked if it would be okay if missionaries could come to her house and visit her. She got excited! She was really happy."

Andrea and her teenage son, Joseph, were baptised six weeks later in January 2017.

"I used to be scared about sharing the gospel with my family and what they would say," Teresa said. "But you never know what people are thinking. I had no idea Andrea had been thinking about the Church all this time. We have no idea what is in people's heart. We just need to have the courage to share. Nothing bad can come out of it."

And as for Andrea, she said her life has "unbelievably" changed because Teresa had the courage to share the gospel online. "I'm so blessed," she said. "I know that Heavenly Father is there and He has a plan for us. I don't have to worry about anything. I feel more at peace. I've become happier." ■

## Māori Saints and Guests Gather for Wananga

By Mormon Newsroom

"It was amazing, absolutely mind-blowing," said one of the attendees of the Tuia Mai Wananga (seminar) that she and over 150 other Māori were present for in Kaikohe on the 9–11 of February.

Kaikohe stake president Trevor Beatson invited members and guests from the Māori community to attend the event held at the Mataitaua Marae.

Topics discussed over the weekend included faith, family, history, culture, language and diversity. A central theme was seeking ways to strengthen faith, families and communities.

Among the speakers over the weekend was Mr Herewini Jones.

President Beatson called for this wananga to respond to the strong feeling he had to "gather Māori, gather Māori, gather Māori."

He elaborated on the need for this wananga by saying, "Our people and our families are challenged constantly with things of a worldly nature, and demands are being made on their families, time and energy."

President Beatson said that communities have problems with fragmented families, poverty, gangs, addictions and drugs.



**Members and guests from the Māori community attended a special wananga held at the Mataitaua Marae in Kaikohe.**

"We've got a huge range of social issues here in the far north, and really the answer to overcoming [these issues] is spiritually based and of a spiritual nature," he said.

"Māori understand their spiritual side, and wairua (spirit) to them is so important. Coming together [to discuss these things of spiritual significance] and extending challenges and invitations to our people has been really positive."

He continued, "We have invited Māori to come to the Marae, to come together to knit together and communicate about spiritual things. We've put the call out to bring Māori to the Marae so we can sit in a safe environment and talk about really important

spiritual things that affect Māori and our families.”

Auckland mission president James Walker and his wife, Harumi, were also present.

Regarding the gathering, President Walker said these meetings are “an important way to be able to reach out to the Māori people and let them know that their ancestors knew about God, that they spoke of Him, and this

is a time that they gather together again once more.”

President Beatson felt that attendees left feeling inspired to remember their forefathers and honour their Māori legacy.

“The desired result is that they will return to their homes prepared to combat societal issues, as well as strengthen their communities, iwi, hapu, and families.” ■

One of the lessons we had set up was with our investigator Kimberly and her daughter, Emily. Our lesson was set up to be at the chapel. After we arrived there and waited for a while, it became apparent to us they had forgotten. We went to their house and knocked on their door. The light in the door’s peephole disappeared (a clear indication they had looked to see who was knocking), but there was no answer.

Feeling defeated, Elder Arocho and I started heading back to the car. We had done everything we could. Our best efforts had been exerted, and it felt like water slipping through our fingers.

We stopped on the path back to the car and decided to sit down before leaving. Not knowing what to expect, we offered a prayer up to Heavenly Father. Our simple but heartfelt prayer went something like, “Dear Heavenly Father, we are doing everything we can. This is Your work. We need Your help. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.”

As soon as we closed the prayer, a door opened behind us. It was Emily. She was coming out of her friend’s house. Emily came and sat next to us. We knew she had the desire to be baptised, but we weren’t sure why. We asked her, “Emily, why do you want to be baptized?” She responded with a simple faith: “I want to be closer to Jesus, and He can help me when I get bullied at school. I want to know someone understands me.”

## MISSIONARY MOMENTS

# I Came to Know Who Heavenly Father Was

By Trent Hulme

There are commonalities that unite each of us and differences that make life interesting. The commonality between every person who ever has or will walk the earth is our divine heritage. We are all “children of the most High” (Psalm 82:6).

Knowing our divine worth and who we can become, a loving Heavenly Father encourages each of us to stay on the path that leads to eternal life and never-ending happiness. He also allows us the ability to choose whether we want to stay on that path. No matter what path we choose, there will always

be ups and downs. But that same loving Father has provided a way for the ups to be even sweeter and the downs to be a little more bearable.

I learned this fundamental truth while serving as a full-time missionary in the Utah Salt Lake City East Mission. In my journal, I wrote the following:

“Today was an emotional and spiritual roller coaster. Though a hard day, it was an unforeseen sacred day. Right from the start of the day, we had lessons cancel. We spent a large portion of our morning diligently trying to find members we could bring along to our lessons for the evening that didn’t end up happening. Everyone we spoke to was uninterested. I felt like my faith was lacking. I was crying out, as the Saviour once did, ‘Father, why hast thou forsaken me? Why is no one interested?’”





Trent (right) served in the Utah Salt Lake City East Mission from December 2015 to June 2017.

Another experience where I saw this to be true was in my last six weeks. I had been moved to a new area with a companion who had been out for six weeks. Everyday we laboured diligently to build up the Lord's kingdom. It got to the point where we felt as if power walking was not enough; we wanted to run from place to place to reach as many people as we could. Waiting at stoplights without talking to the person next to us was, in our minds, a waste of time. We were doing everything we could and still were not seeing the success we desired.

Driving one day, my companion asked me, "What are we doing wrong? Why is nothing happening? We are being obedient; we are working hard. Why is no one interested?" I admit, in my quiet moments, I had asked myself the same questions.

I felt impressed by the Spirit to refer him to *Preach My Gospel*, chapter 6, which is about Christlike attributes. I asked my companion to read a quote by President Ezra Taft Benson in the section on diligence (page 121), which states:

"I have often said one of the greatest secrets of missionary work is work! If a missionary works, he will get the Spirit; if he gets the Spirit, he will teach by the Spirit; and if he teaches by the Spirit, he will touch the hearts of the people and he will be happy."

The gospel and the Atonement of Jesus Christ are so simple and personal. It is no wonder we are commanded to become as a child.

Whether our challenges are self-inflicted or the product of another's mistakes, the source of all healing and comfort in our lives is Jesus Christ. Just as little Emily said, Jesus Christ understands us. He suffered in Gethsemane, was "betrayed into the hands of sinners" (Matthew 26:45), suffered and died so He could confidently say, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

I learned over the course of my two years as a missionary that there will always be spiritual and emotional roller coasters. Life inevitably throws everyone a curveball. However, we have the doctrinal promise from the Lord Himself: "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:18).

How grateful I am for that promise. In all situations, God is our loving Father in Heaven. The Saviour of the world is our best friend and atoned for not only our sins but our pains, afflictions, weaknesses and sicknesses. In short, He understands us and will not leave us comfortless.

As he got to this point, the Spirit in the car was palpable. Tears filled both of our eyes. He continued the quote:

“There will be no homesickness, no worrying about families, for all time and talents and interests are centered on the work of the ministry. Work, work, work—there is no satisfactory substitute, especially in missionary work.”

As we drove and discussed our thoughts, we concluded that though we were not seeing the desired success, the Lord was pleased with our efforts.

Months later, as I look back on this experience with gratitude, the scripture in Doctrine and Covenants 97:8 fills me with a greater appreciation for a merciful Father in Heaven:

“Verily I say unto you, all among them who know their hearts are honest, and are broken, and their spirits contrite, and are willing to observe their covenants by sacrifice—yea, every sacrifice which I, the Lord, shall command—they are accepted of me.”

I know that the Lord is merciful in all situations. He loves us with an “everlasting kindness” (Isaiah 54:8). Though our efforts seem weak, He is accepting when we put our best foot forward. ■

*Trent is from Auckland and served in the Utah Salt Lake City East Mission from December 2015 to June 2017. He is currently in the YSA ward in Takapuna.*

## AREA WEBSITES

[pacific.lds.org](http://pacific.lds.org)

[www.mormonnewsroom.org.nz](http://www.mormonnewsroom.org.nz)