

AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

On the Covenant Pathway

By Elder Joseph W. Sitati

First Counselor, Africa Southeast Area Presidency



Elder Joseph W. Sitati

Baptism marks our first covenant as we journey through life as disciples of Jesus Christ. This first ordinance brings us into a personal, covenant relationship with the Father, made possible by His love and grace through the atoning sacrifice of His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Through our obedience in keeping the covenants of the gospel, the Father promises us eternal life, including enduring peace and joy in this life.

The conditions of all covenants govern two relationships essential for the fulfillment of these promises. The first is the relationship with the Father and with Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. The second is the relationship with our fellow men and women who have ever lived, are now living, or will yet live on the earth.

Jesus taught that there are ultimately only two commandments: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

“This is the first and great commandment.

“And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

“On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:37–40). Every covenant of the gospel witnesses these two great

commandments. Both are founded on love.

Nephi taught that upon making our first covenant, “then are ye in this strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life; yea, ye have entered in by the gate” (2 Nephi 31:18). The straight and narrow path is more of a Liahona (see 1 Nephi 16:10), a compass pointing the direction we should take to eventually obtain the blessing of eternal life in the presence of the Father. It is less of a cleared pathway that we simply tread upon to press forward on our eternal journey. While the Liahona points us to where we should go, a loving Heavenly Father,

who wants us to grow, sometimes leaves it to each of us to clear the way ahead of us.

Nephi paints a picture for us when he says, “For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost.

“And then are ye in this strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:17–18). Other ordinances including priesthood ordination and all the ordinances of the temple might be compared to additional gates along the path as we progress toward Heavenly Father.



Except for the sacrament, each gate is a symbolic entry point for the associated covenant and marks the progress we have made on our spiritual journey. The sacrament provides the opportunity for us to “return” to each gate every week by renewing our covenants thus reaffirming our commitment to fulfill all the obligations we have accepted in return for the promised blessings.

Between each gate and each “return,” we face opposition from the adversary. In addition, it is requisite that we perform the duties of our covenant. We clear our pathway as we strive to overcome opposition and to fulfill the responsibilities of our covenants.

Whenever we qualify to enter a gate along the path, we fulfill the first great commandment and qualify for the blessings we need to help us as we press forward toward the next gate. In response to our desire and prayer, Heavenly Father grants us power through the grace of His Son to overcome opposition and to keep our covenants. We could never qualify for eternal life through relying only on our own ability.

Also pressing forward are other travelers, children of God like ourselves, our brothers and sisters. For some, because of poor choices made previously, their Liahona no longer works, and they wander in “forbidden paths” (1 Nephi 8:28). Yet others are unaware that there is a God or reject that notion, dismissing the reality of the existence of God whenever it conflicts with their own worldly wisdom.

Of all such, our living prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, made a passionate plea to all members of the Lord’s restored Church at general conference in April this year.¹ To the leaders of the Church, he said:

“We will focus on inspired ministering to individuals and families. . . . Our charge from the Lord is recorded in section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants. There we are instructed to ‘visit the house of each member, exhorting them to pray vocally and in secret and attend to all family duties’ and ‘watch over the church always, and be with and strengthen them.’”²

President Nelson’s plea has echoed around the whole world.

Sister Sitati and I rejoice in the opportunity of joining you, my brothers and sisters in this great area, at this critical point in our journey of discipleship, in the history of the Lord’s Church.

May we together respond to the call of our prophet with singular devotion. Our opportunity in this area is great. Great too will be our capacity, as we rise to stand with President Nelson in this great cause and receive the strengthening power of the Savior’s mercy, grace, and forgiveness through the Holy Ghost.

I pray that the Lord will grant to each one of us the desire to do our part, to obey the second great commandment, that we may help guide many of our brothers and sisters to the next gate on their path, that they may obey the first great commandment,

and that together we may always have power to continue our eternal spiritual journey as we build up the kingdom of God upon the earth.

The promise of the Lord at the end of our strait and narrow path is sure: “Well done thou good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Matthew 25:21). ■

Elder Joseph W. Sitati was sustained as a General Authority Seventy in April 2009. He is married to Gladys Nangoni; they are the parents of five children.

NOTES

1. See Russell M. Nelson, “Ministering,” *Liahona*, May 2018, 100.
2. Russell M. Nelson, General Authority training, April 2018.

AREA SEVENTY MESSAGE

Reach Out and Serve One Another

By Elder Walter Chatora

Area Seventy



Elder Walter Chatora

The Savior has appointed us as the ambassadors to save His children. He is not here to do it, and hence the mandate to rescue falls upon us.

Many years ago, Walton, my teenage son, and I were assigned as home teachers to the Brown family (name has been changed). Brother



Brown had become disaffected with the Church and turned his back on the gospel. His wife, two teenage daughters, and a young son remained active. We prayed deeply to seek inspiration on how we could help this family. Prior to losing his way, Brother Brown was a very faithful brother who held prominent Church callings. When I served in the bishopric, he was the executive secretary—and he always performed his duties with diligence.

The first few visits were a bit awkward as he would ask us “strange” gospel questions. The good thing is he allowed us in his home. We did not pressure him to return, we just persevered as we ministered with love. He knew we were genuine and deeply interested in him and his family. We eventually became good friends and he would look forward to our visits. His wife and children did not hesitate to call us when they needed any help—be it transportation or to give priesthood blessings. We promptly availed ourselves all the time. We became like family and we were happy to serve. Brother Brown did not respond immediately, but we continued to minister, trusting in the Lord’s timing. We prayed and fasted often, pleading with the Lord

to soften his heart and seeking for guidance on how we could bless, strengthen, encourage, and inspire the family.

After a number of years, the miracles unraveled as he started taking his son to Church activities. It was great to see how close he became to his son in the process. Then slowly but assuredly, he started attending church again. It was sweet to witness since many had given up on him. The family was thrilled. We as home teachers quietly felt that our visits had eventually opened the door for his return. Today he is an active participant again. Perhaps more importantly, he worships in the temple every Friday for five hours. He, without fail, attends two endowment sessions and then serves as a veil worker.

A few years ago, I accompanied Elder Carl B. Cook of the Seventy to split the Pretoria Stake. After the conference, Brother Brown beckoned me to come over to him; we embraced for what felt like an eternity, then in between sobs, he uttered the words “It’s because of you that I am here today to witness this and partake of the fruits of the gospel. It’s because of you; thank you, thank you.” I sobbed with him and meekly responded, “It’s not because of me. My son and I were only instruments in Heavenly Father’s hands.” It was an unforgettable moment where we both strongly felt of His Spirit.

Walton and I were genuine friends to him and his family. We were anxiously engaged—ours was not to fulfill an assignment. It was a sacred

calling where we visited at the very least once a month, meeting the needs of the family. President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) said, “A friend cares. A friend loves. A friend listens, and a friend reaches out.”¹ We tried to be all of the above and as a result the family members called us ‘home teachers’ instead of our actual names. Up to this day, whenever we meet anyone of them, the greeting is always, “Hello, my home teacher!”

When the Pharisee lawyer asked, “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” the Savior answered: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

“This is the first and great commandment.

“And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matthew 22:36–39).

He also made the profound pronouncement in John 13:34–35, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”

While serving as a member of the Seventy, Elder James M. Paramore said, “When God’s love is known and felt and His commandments followed, the results are always the same. There is a newness of life—a spiritual awakening—that comes to man.”² I strongly feel that this was the case with Brother Brown.



SELF-RELIANCE SERIES

Meditation: The 15-Minute- a-Day Habit to Increasing Spirituality

By T. Ruth Randall

Meditation is a form of prayer. It is one of the most secret, most sacred doors through which we pass into the presence of the Lord.

The physical component of self-reliance is, in many ways, visible and assessable. You either live within your means or you don't. You can measure how well you are budgeting or building up your food storage.

The spiritual aspect of self-reliance is much more difficult to define. How do you determine how spiritually self-reliant you are, and how do you increase it? It's not as easy as balancing your income with your expenses.

In my 12-month self-reliance experiment, I've spent some time trying to answer this question, and for me, it comes down to one thing. How well do I receive personal revelation, and do I have the courage to allow it to guide my life? Spiritual self-reliance means that I don't need a mediator, a middle man, or a priesthood leader to receive clear spiritual direction: I can—and must—receive it directly into my own heart and mind.

There are many Browns out there—many feet to steady, hands to grasp, minds to encourage, hearts to inspire, and souls to save—as reminded by President Thomas S. Monson. The Savior has appointed us as the ambassadors to save His children. He is not here to do it, and hence the mandate to rescue falls upon us. We should reach out mainly to the new members, the less-active members, the lonely, and those in need of comfort. We should watch over them and strengthen their faith “one by one” as the Savior did, being acquainted with them and loving them without judgement.

The worth of souls is great in the sight of God. The Savior taught powerfully on caring for the one. The parables in Luke 15 allude to this: the Lost Sheep, the Lost Piece of Silver, and the Prodigal Son. We can emulate the Savior as His followers, going about doing good, watching over His sheep. We can express our faith in practical ways as we touch hearts, change lives, and save souls—this is one of the tests of true discipleship.

“And if it be so that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father!

“And now, if your joy will be great with one soul that you have brought unto me into the kingdom of my Father, how great will be your joy if you should bring many souls unto me!”³

I feel this great joy every time I see Brother Brown. I can attest as President Monson promised that the blessings of eternity await us as we actively participate on the stage of service. And that as we love our God, as we love our neighbor, we can be the recipients of our Heavenly Father's love. ■

Elder Walter Chatora was named an Area Seventy in April 2014. He is married to Diana Tafumanei; they are the parents of three children. Elder and Sister Chatora reside in Centurion, Pretoria, South Africa.

NOTES

1. Ezra Taft Benson, “To the Home Teachers of the Church,” *Ensign*, May 1987, 50.
2. James M. Paramore, “Love One Another,” *Ensign*, May 1981, 53.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 18:15–16.

Sister Barbara Thompson, former Second Counselor in the Relief Society General Presidency, reflects on the account of Lehi teaching his family the gospel. Once Lehi had taught certain principles, “Nephi had sought the guidance of the Lord in order to more fully understand the teachings of his father,” says Sister Thompson. “He was lifted, blessed, and inspired to know that the teachings of his father were true. That enabled Nephi to carefully follow the commandments of the Lord and live a righteous life. He received personal revelation to guide him.

“On the other hand, Laman and Lemuel were disputing with each other because they did not understand the teachings of their father. Nephi then asked a very important question: ‘Have ye inquired of the Lord?’

“Their response was a weak one,” says Sister Thompson. “‘We have not; for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us.’”¹

How can we become more like Nephi and less like his brothers: actively receiving clear answers to guide our lives rather than acting as helpless victims who must “wait” to have things made known unto us?

For me, one of the most practical ways to do this is through meditation. In the few months that I’ve been practicing it, it has had a profoundly powerful effect on my life.

President David O. McKay (1873–1970) said: “We pay too little attention

to the value of meditation, a principle of devotion. . . . Meditation is the language of the soul. It is defined as ‘a form of private devotion, or spiritual exercise, consisting in deep, continued reflection on some religious theme.’ Meditation is a form of prayer. . . .

“[It] is one of the most secret, most sacred doors through which we pass into the presence of the Lord.”²

That definition is something to work toward, but I’ve started with the basics. I try to spend 10 or 15 minutes a day following a simple guided meditation that allows me to connect wholly with one train of thought. In the process, I also spend time being mindful of my body and my spirit overall. That might sound simple and possibly even trite. But in reality, it’s hugely challenging and enlightening.

Interested in trying it out? My friend Larissa Reed served her mission with me and has been meditating for some years. She has seen its miraculous effects in her life. I asked her for some basic beginner’s tips. She says:

1. Set and commit to a time once or twice a day. How long you spend on it doesn’t matter as much as the fact that you DO it.
2. Move. Get your body doing something for a few minutes. Jumping jacks, yoga, a little jog—anything that gets your heart rate up.
3. Sit comfortably and prepare to watch the “show.” Your mind will

give out all kinds of reasons not to sit in meditation. Push through it. You can find some great guided meditations on YouTube or you can just sit in silence and connect to yourself and your soul. Don’t have any expectations, only curiosity about what you will learn and feel. The purpose is not to clear your mind, it’s to hear your mind and feel your heart.

As I’ve practiced regular meditation, I’ve found that I can correct myself more quickly and easily. I’m kinder to myself and others, and I’m more in tune with what the Spirit is telling me.

Pam Blackwell, a meditation expert who teaches at Brigham Young University and authored *Christ-Centered Meditation: A Handbook for Spiritual Practice* put it this way: “I think meditation is the major tool to enhancing our connection with our Heavenly Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit,” she said. “I spend a lot more time during the day in a relaxed, receptive spiritual state. . . . If I’m prayerful about something, I am much more aware of the answers all around me. I live in a pretty joyous state; I’m in a good mood—a ‘God mood.’”³ ■

NOTES

1. Barbara Thompson, “Personal Revelation and Testimony,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2011, 9.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: David O. McKay* (2003), 31–32.
3. Pam Blackwell, “Faithful Meditation,” Mormon Channel Blog, Apr. 7, 2015, mormonchannel.org/blog/post/faithful-meditation.

A Habit of Fasting

By Sister Djimi

Kinshasa Democratic Republic of the Congo Mission

When I started my mission, I decided to develop better habits which—I planned—would stick with me throughout the course of my missionary service and even after my mission was over.

Among those things was a habit of fasting.

Before my mission, I fasted just by obedience. I did not truly understand the importance of this commandment. But once on my mission, I decided to increase my knowledge of the fast. I wanted to live a real fasting experience—one that would help me to stay strong. I knew the fast could give me spiritual power and also help me teach with power and authority. And I wanted to be an example to all the people that I was serving or that I was serving with. As I fasted, I really felt all the promises related to the fast.

Over the next few months, as I was beginning to understand the very meaning of fasting, I found myself overwhelmed with trials. Life was hard for me. Not finding any easy solution, I had a strong sense that I needed to fast and pray. But that feeling also prompted me that I should also improve my way of fasting and praying. That sounded so strange to me because I was certain I had already understood how.

So, I started pondering because I really wanted to follow that feeling. I was convinced it would bring me closer to God and allow me to find an answer to my afflictions. Ultimately, I had an idea to develop a fasting plan, which would include all that I would do throughout my fasting day.

It looked like this:

1. Before starting the fast, put myself in a quiet and clean place.
2. Focus while singing three hymns—especially those about the sacrament—and meditate on the words contained in those hymns.
3. Read the Book of Mormon. I felt especially prompted to read 3 Nephi 11:10, 11, and 14 and would read these verses quietly while thinking as though it was Christ speaking directly to me and that I was on my knees in front of Him. I tried to fill myself with that joy as if I were in the presence of the Saviour.
4. Pray to mark the beginning of my fast.
5. Sing hymns throughout the day.
6. Read scriptures which speak about the Atonement.
7. Meditate on these scriptures in order to be taught.
8. End my 24 hours of fasting with a prayer.

As I followed my plan, I really felt the Spirit and I drew closer to Heavenly Father. I understood that we can always improve our spiritual experiences, but only if we rely on the Spirit and follow all the promptings.

Now that I have matured my understanding of the fast, I am very happy—and I know personally that the Lord answers my prayers.

I feel His presence by my side and a deep sense of peace. I truly love the fast because it brings me closer to God and it helps me feed my spirit as well as my soul.

I always pray that God gives me the strength and determination to fast. ■



Sister Djimi

The Power of Testimony

By Elder Lukonga

Lubumbashi Democratic Republic
of the Congo Mission

Recently, as our small group of missionaries was traveling from the Ghana Accra Missionary Training Centre to our mission assignment in Lubumbashi, we met two women at the Kenya airport departure lounge. As newly trained missionaries having a great desire to teach, we approached and made acquaintance with them. After introducing ourselves, I had the opportunity to present the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is what we strive to share with everyone.

It was difficult for those women to give us much time to listen, or to accept an appointment, or even to take the pamphlets we offered them. But an idea came to my mind that we should not insist but rather that we should just bear simple testimony of the gospel.

Right before boarding the plane bound for Lubumbashi, one of those women approached and told me that she had been thinking about what I had said and was now aware that this message was important for her and her whole family. Her interest came about simply because of the testimony I had borne and the confidence that I had to say that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was the only true Church here on the earth.



Elder Lukonga

She also said to me that she had been asking herself two questions: “Why was this young missionary able to bear such a sure testimony?” “How can I also gain a testimony of these things myself?”

Apparently, my testimony had pre-occupied her, and I immediately realized that just bearing our testimony influences many people to ponder and be converted.

It is like Brigham Young, the second prophet, seer, and revelator of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, when he was converted just through the testimony of a man named Eleazer Miller, who—without eloquence and talents for public

speaking—had simply borne his testimony by saying, “I know, by the power of the Holy Ghost, that the Book of Mormon is true” (see *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* [1997], 315).

This airport experience taught me that our testimony does not depend on eloquence—or the power of our voice—but it does depend on the conviction of our heart. That is why when we become converted, our testimony has power and affects those who listen to it.

Recently in a zone conference, Elder Joni L. Koch, Second Counselor in the Africa Southeast Area Presidency, taught us how we can receive this testimony in order to be truly converted unto the Lord. He said, “The Lord speaks to us in our mind and in our heart, and this is revelation or an answer from God. By the same channel we also receive a testimony—and once we have this testimony from the Holy Ghost, we become converted unto the Lord.”

We all know that a testimony is the truthful spiritual confirmation or assurance given by the Holy Ghost—and is unlike anything we tell as stories or share as experiences every fast and testimony meeting in our wards.

The greatest blessing that Brigham Young received from the testimony of the man without eloquence was—and I quote his own words: “The Holy Ghost proceeding from that individual illuminate[d] my understanding, and

light, glory, and immortality [were] before me. I was encircled by them, filled with them, and I knew for myself that the testimony of the man was true” (see *Teachings: Brigham Young*, 3).

Being born in the Church, I relied on the testimony of my parents, Christopher Lukonga and Christine Tshilobo, who had joined the Church well before I was born. During my

childhood, I heard many people say that the Church was true, but I did not know it for myself. But after a long time—thanks to the reading of the Book of Mormon, prayer, and a lot of personal study—I gained my own testimony.

Today I know that God is our Heavenly Father. Jesus is the living Christ, the Only Begotten Son of the Father, our Saviour and Redeemer. I

know that He, Christ, did performed the infinite Atonement for us. I know that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, the prophet of the Restoration of the gospel in the last dispensation. And I know that today we are led by a living prophet named Russell M. Nelson.

And I testify to you that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the Saviour’s true Church on earth. ■

General Conference Talks Are a Source of Comfort for Troubled and Grieved Hearts

By Elder Bondo Bokel

Lubumbashi Democratic Republic of the Congo Mission

I had been on my mission for 13 months when I received a phone call from my mission president informing me of the death of my dear sister Solange. This news broke my heart, and I shed tears of sadness as I remembered the beautiful moments we had spent together throughout her life of nearly 20 years. My pain over losing her was very deep.

As we approached the weekend, I realized that we were coming up on general conference. And in spite of my sorrow and pain, my companion and I went to watch the conference broadcast at the chapel.

Who would have known, but in his talk entitled “Confide in God Unwaveringly,” Elder Ulisses Soares recounted an experience that exactly described my situation. He said, “Years ago while serving as a mission president, I received a phone call from the parents of one of our beloved

missionaries informing me of the death of his sister. I remember, in the tenderness of that moment, that missionary and I discussed God’s marvelous plan of salvation for His children and how this knowledge would comfort him.

“Although he was stunned and saddened by that adversity, this missionary—through his tears and with faith in God—rejoiced in his sister’s life. He expressed unwavering confidence in the tender mercies of the Lord. Resolutely, he told me that he would continue to serve his mission with all faith and diligence in order to be worthy of the promises that God had for him and his family. In this time of need, that faithful missionary turned his heart to God, placed all of his trust in Him, and renewed his commitment to serve the Lord with faith and with all diligence” (*Liahona*, May 2017, 35).

Dear brothers and sisters, I felt that every word, every sentence of this talk was addressed directly to me—and what a source of comfort! I testify that God speaks to us every six months through the mouths of His servants in general conference. ■

