

AREA LEADERSHIP MESSAGE

“Lovest Thou Me?”

By Elder Glenn Burgess

Area Seventy



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To serve our Saviour is to love Him, and to love Him is to know Him.

As the disciples travelled with the Saviour into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked them, “Whom say ye that I am?” Peter answered and said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”¹ Then, at the sea of Tiberias, the now resurrected Christ asked Peter, “Lovest thou me more than these?” Peter resolutely responded, “Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.”²

Peter knew through the Holy Ghost that Jesus was the Christ. He had received his own personal revelation,

and this became his personal witness and testimony. The Saviour acknowledged this by saying, “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.”³ After Peter had professed his love for the Saviour, Jesus responded with the command, “Feed my sheep.”⁴ To serve our Saviour is to love Him, and to love Him is to know Him.

Last year in the April general conference, President Russell M. Nelson announced a new and holier approach

to how we care and minister to others. He said, “The Lord has made important adjustments in the way we care for each other.”⁵ Then in the October general conference, President Nelson announced the implementation of “a *home-centered* and *Church-supported* plan to learn doctrine, strengthen faith, and foster greater personal worship.”⁶

As Peter continued to develop in his own faith, the Saviour said to him, “When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”⁷ President Nelson’s announcements of a home centred on learning the doctrine and of the newer, holier approach to caring for and ministering to others allow us to do the very two things Christ asked of Peter.

First, we are to develop our own personal conversion to the Saviour, Jesus Christ. Whether the Sunday meeting schedule is three hours or two, it is within the walls of our own homes that we will receive much of our personal conversion and conviction.

President James E. Faust (1920–2007), Second Counselor in the First Presidency, said, “If we really want our homes to be places of holiness, we will try harder to do those things that are conducive to the Spirit of the Lord.”⁸ The Church-supported resource

Come, Follow Me—For Individuals and Families is designed to help us better learn the gospel, whether on our own or with our family.

When introducing any new adjustments to a personal or family schedule, it may come with its own challenges. Understanding this, President Nelson provided us with this reassurance: “I promise that as you diligently work to remodel your home into a center of gospel learning, over time *your* Sabbath days will truly be a delight. *Your* children will be excited to learn and to live the Savior’s teachings, and the influence of the adversary in *your* life and in *your* home will decrease. Changes in your family will be dramatic and sustaining.”⁹

The second aspect of Peter’s directive was to strengthen his brethren. We now commonly refer to this as “ministering”. Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said ministering is “simply discipleship. We’re following the Savior. We’re trying to do what the Good Shepherd did and follow the example that He set, and our doctrine is to follow Christ and be His disciples in every way.”¹⁰ As we develop Christlike qualities within ourselves, the responsibility of our ministering assignments will not seem burdensome, but rather, it will feel desirable and be both rewarding and fulfilling.

What was Christ referring to when He used the word *these*, when He asked Peter, “Lovest thou me more than *these*?”¹¹ It refers to the busyness and the many other influences in our lives that compete for our time and attention.

Elder Christofferson said, “To persevere firm and steadfast in the faith of Christ requires that the gospel of Jesus Christ penetrate one’s heart and soul, meaning that the gospel becomes not just one of many influences in a person’s life but the defining focus of his or her life and character.”¹² As we develop our testimony in Christ, our conversion becomes our conviction. We can then answer as Peter did and resolutely say, “‘Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee’—for ‘thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.’”¹³ ■

NOTES

1. Matthew 16:15–16.
2. John 21:15.
3. Matthew 16:17.
4. John 21:16.
5. Russell M. Nelson, “Let Us All Press On,” *Ensign*, May 2018, 118.
6. Russell M. Nelson, “Opening Remarks,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2018, 8.
7. Luke 22:32.
8. James E. Faust, “Standing in Holy Places,” *Ensign*, May 2005, 68.
9. Russell M. Nelson, “Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2018, 113.
10. D. Todd Christofferson, in *Effective Ministering* (video), ministering.lds.org.
11. John 21:15; emphasis added.
12. D. Todd Christofferson, “Firm and Steadfast in the Faith of Christ,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2018, 30.
13. See John 21:15 and Matthew 16:16.

LOCAL PAGES

“Row on Sundays, or You Don’t Row at All”

Kainoa Lepou

“The coach put it to me pretty simply,” Kainoa said. “Either you row on Sundays, or you don’t row at all. I chose not at all.”

Though it was hard to walk away from the team where his fellow rowers went on to win multiple gold medals, Kainoa hasn’t looked back.

For Kainoa, the decision not to play sports on Sunday had been made while in Primary. This personal decision was his sign to the Lord that he did indeed love the Sabbath.

“Really it was an easy choice to make because I’d already made it long ago.”

As a teenager, Kainoa Lepou showed great promise as a rower. He belonged to a top rowing program and was one of the strongest performers. The only problem was, all the finals were held on Sundays, and he was not willing to give up the Sabbath.

Kainoa didn’t have to wait long to see the blessings of this choice; the Lord had prepared an even greater opportunity.

“Leaving the rowing team gave me more time to focus on basketball,” he said. “I might have lost the chance to



"I know I'll be all good if I do what God asks of me."

row, but that same year I was selected to be in the New Zealand U16 Boys' team, which was a huge blessing. I know I'll be all good if I do what God asks of me."

This year, Kainoa's commitment to the Sabbath has been especially challenging since he played for three big teams simultaneously:

- New Zealand U17s
- Auckland U19s
- Rosmini College's senior premier team



"It's a huge commitment," Kainoa said. "I usually don't go a day without training—sometimes training multiple times a day. Well, every day except Sunday."

Though still very young, Kainoa continues to see the promised blessings of his commitment through his



understanding coaches, big wins and the occasional miracle.

"This year I was blessed to go to the FIBA World [Cup] Champs with the New Zealand team," he said. "Our Rosmini team went to Nationals and ended up winning. There have been so many blessings!"

At the FIBA World Cup championships, missing Sunday games was particularly difficult for Kainoa and his team because one of the last games was on Sunday.

"It was hard, but as always, I saw God bless me for choosing not to play," he said. "One time, at the worlds, I got really sick just before a game and barely made it to warm-ups. I asked my dad for a blessing and ended up

being the top scorer for our team that game. There have just been so many blessings.”

As well as keeping the Sabbath day holy, Kainoa has also made serving a full-time mission a priority, knowing that when he serves, he will be blessed.

“Not a lot of universities want to give scholarships to guys who are going to take two years off in the middle, but I made the choice long ago to serve a mission, and I’m not afraid to stick to that. If you put the Lord first, He will take care of the rest of your life. That’s what I live by.” ■

The Sabbath: A Blessing, Not a Sacrifice

By Crystal Viljoen

Bishop Tim Butters of Wellington Ward, New Zealand, grew up with a strong passion for two things: the gospel and filmmaking.

Over the years, the 34-year-old father of three invested heavily in both passions, but he quickly discovered the two conflicted in a significant way.

“I decided early in my career that I would not work on the Sabbath,” Tim said. “This was a big decision as most films require at least some Sunday work.”

Avoiding filmmaking on Sundays made booking jobs a lot harder. Though Tim missed out on many opportunities, his dedication brought some success with small jobs on films such as *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*,

The Adventures of Tintin, *The Hobbit* and others.

“I made this decision because I love the Sabbath,” Tim said. “I didn’t see it as a sacrifice for a future blessing but a blessing itself. I make sure to invest in a good Sabbath every week, and that makes it easier to keep my commitment to it.”

In 2017, the ‘big break’ Tim was looking for came: the chance to be the Steadicam operator on a feature film. The other small jobs were good, and they helped him move up the ladder, but the chance to be the Steadicam operator would significantly raise his status in the industry.

“People in the industry knew about my commitment to the Sabbath, but



“I make sure to invest in a good Sabbath every week, and that makes it easier to keep my commitment to it.”

they would often doublecheck that I was sticking to it. I’d worked with this director of photography before,

but he asked again if I was sure about Sundays. I told him that I would love the opportunity and could work every other day but Sunday.”

With low expectations, Tim waited three months for an answer. The unexpected call came while he was on holiday. He was booked. He was told that while the schedule would be Sunday to Thursday, *he* would not be required to work on any of the scheduled Sundays.

“This was not just a big break—it was actually a childhood dream come true,” Tim said. “I’ve always loved Wellington City, and the iconic city streets had been the backdrop for most of the short films I’d made when I was young. Now I would be filming on those same streets but as a proper cameraman making good money.”

Tim was grateful for the Lord’s hand in this miracle. However, there was one more tender mercy to come.

“There was this one particular day I was looking forward to the most,” Tim said. “It was a huge night shoot with heaps of extras right on Lambton Quay. When I found out it was on Sunday night, I was pretty disappointed. I’d gotten used to missing out on things, but this one was going to hurt.”

To many people it would have been understandable to make an exception. The shoot would begin long after his Church commitments had finished. Tim, however, wasted

no time finding a stand-in to replace him for that night.

“There was no decision to make. It had been made years ago . . . I saw it as an opportunity to really prove to myself and to the Lord how much I loved and valued the Sabbath.”

The day before the shoot, the stand-in became suddenly unavailable and the director of photography was forced to operate the Steadicam himself.

“I remember wishing I could do more to help. I gave him all my gear to use, then went about my Sabbath, which was much like any other: sacrament [meeting], bishop’s interviews, time with the youth and then back home to be with my family.”

The tender mercy came that afternoon in a very short text from the director of photography that read: ‘Are you free at midnight?’

Tim arrived at Lambton Quay at midnight on Monday morning.

“The whole street had been shut down,” Tim said. “It was full of extras and lights and there was my rig waiting for me. The shoot was everything I’d hoped it would be.”

Tim already had his big break. However, the bonus of being a part of the shoot that night was an added gift from a loving Heavenly Father.

“God knows my dreams and aspirations in perfect detail,” Tim

said. “It was nice to know that the little things that matter to me matter to Him too. The blessing of the Sabbath is worth more to me than any film, but I know I was doubly blessed on that day because of my commitment to it.” ■

Father of Eight Leads the Way for His Whānau

By Crystal Viljoen

As a young man, Tiwai Parai struggled at school. Among other things, he suffered from a speech impediment and had difficulty reading. Though his patriarchal blessing urged him to consider his education, he felt that just wasn’t something he could do.

“I was too embarrassed to reveal my struggles,” Tiwai said. “At one point I did have someone at school who worked with me on my reading, but he had no understanding of the learning deficiencies I had, so his methods didn’t work and only made my problem worse.

“I sat at the back of class, and everything went over my head. One year passed in this way, then two years—until it had become a pattern.



“Because of what I endured, I can discern those who are struggling, and I offer to help.”

Eventually, it became a part of my identity: that I was not a learned person.”

This belief took decades to shift. “I heard the spiritual direction from our leaders to get educated, but because I wasn’t a learned person, I just didn’t take it to heart. I didn’t think it applied to me.”

And gradually something changed. “I wanted to change the direction of our family from struggle to success,” said Tiwai. “I decided that I was not going to let this happen to my children,” he said. “I wasn’t going to let my barriers hold them back as well.”

Now this father of eight and grandfather of eleven has started a business degree at Wintec Waikato Institute of

Technology along with three of his older daughters.

Setting an example of leadership in more than one way, Tiwai also works full-time and actively helps with the day-to-day care of his grandchildren in order to help support his daughters so that they can complete their educations quickly.

“They are the priority,” he said. “I don’t mind when I finish. I want to see them graduate.”

Tiwai noted, “Around our dinner table, the conversation is all about learning and education. We talk about assignments and tutorials while the younger kids are there listening. It’s changed the culture in our home.”

There are still challenges ahead, but Tiwai presses forward living by the motto that changed his view on education forever: ‘Education is not about learning facts and figures; it’s about training the mind to think.’¹

The long, challenging road to education has given Tiwai a new-found determination to help others who are dealing with the same barriers that he faced.

“This is my time to help,” Tiwai said. “Because of what I endured, I can discern those who are struggling, and I offer to help.” ■

NOTE

1. Based on a quote from Albert Einstein in Philipp Frank, *Einstein: His Life and Times* (1989), 185.

Spiritual Gifts and Choosing a Career

By Judy Soloai

I did not get good grades in high school. While I was growing up, my parents always emphasized the power an education has to change our lives for the better, but I just didn't take it on board.

I come from a big family with five children: two boys and three girls. We were all taught to make education a priority. I attended a few different schools in Hamilton and Auckland but could not catch the vision.

I went on a full-time mission with a plan to study when I got home. I wanted to follow the counsel the prophets gave on education and self-reliance, but I had no plan as to what I should study and had no real passion for any profession.

My mission changed my life. There is not a day that goes by where I don't think about my mission and the impact it has had on my life. It wasn't until I felt the incredible joy of spending every day serving so many of God's children that I realized how much I needed it, and I discovered spiritual gifts I had not before recognized in myself. People told me I had the gift of connecting with people. My outgoing personality made getting along with people easy. I tried to embrace these

spiritual gifts and use them to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

On my mission, I saw many sad living situations, including broken families, individuals suffering with depression and people struggling with the effects of drug addictions. As a missionary, I was able to counsel with

them using the scriptures, and I saw the gospel bless their lives as they tried their best to apply what they learned. Although I loved sharing the gospel with them, I wanted to do so much more.

The more people I served, the more I saw them through Heavenly Father's eyes. Eventually, I gained an unconditional love and empathy for them. I realized that what made me happy was service, was people. This



My mission changed my life.

was what I wanted to do with my life.

There is a strong parallel between being a missionary and being a social worker. The object of both is to change lives for the better. Being a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I am blessed with an understanding of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. I truly believe that people can change, and to be able to make a career out of helping people change is such a blessing to me.

Now I love my studies. I am currently working on a bachelor of social work degree at Brigham Young University. I am passionate about what I'm learning and work as hard as I can. Many of my siblings have gone on to higher education, and as we follow our parents' counsel, we have all seen those blessings that our parents taught us would come.

As I study for my degree, the doctrines of the gospel are right there with me, adding depth to my secular understanding of the world and enhancing my abilities to become a social worker.

When I was young, I didn't see the importance of having a purpose or a mission in life. The Lord has a purpose for me, and I discovered it while on my mission. I did not go on a mission to find myself. I went to share the gospel with as many people as I could, but in losing myself in the work of the Lord, I found myself and my purpose. ■

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