

AREA LEADERSHIP MESSAGE

Knowing of, Understanding, and Keeping the Commandments of God

By Elder Daniel G. Hamilton
Area Seventy, Pacific

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It is one thing to *know* of the commandments. It is another thing to *understand* the commandments. It is yet another to *willingly keep* the commandments.

As a new convert to the Church at age thirteen, I came to *know* of the commandments. However, I did not *understand* the reason for some of the Lord's commandments, nor did I think I could see the blessings of keeping them. For example, having faithfully kept the Word of Wisdom for a time, I found that my strength and stamina in playing sport was no better, and in some cases, far worse, than that of my teammates who disobeyed every facet of the Word of Wisdom. They seemed to be the ones who could “run and not be weary,”¹ not me. However, in faith I continued to obey.

Furthermore, it seemed to me that the commandments were hemming me in and cramping my style. Now, however, some 48 years later I view the commandments as liberating, not confining. What changed? Certainly not the commandments. It is my understanding and attitude that have changed.

I now view the commandments as I view the “swim between the flags” signs at the beach—with appreciation. To freely enjoy a swim at the beach, in an area which has been predetermined as safe, I choose to swim between the flags. Of course, I can choose to swim elsewhere, but in so doing I must accept the consequences of that decision.

I now choose to keep the commandments because I find great peace

and safety in doing so, and with the passage of time, I have seen the blessings of obeying them.

Elder Dale G. Renlund of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, speaking of the commandments, noted: “God’s plan includes directions for us, referred to in the scriptures as commandments. These commandments are neither a whimsical set nor an arbitrary collection of imposed rules meant only to train us to be obedient.



True discipleship is about coming to understand the commandments and then willingly keeping them, because we have come to know that they are a blessing from our loving Father in Heaven.

They are linked to our developing the attributes of godliness, returning to our Heavenly Father, and receiving enduring joy. ... Though God wants us to be on the covenant path, He gives us the dignity of choosing.”²

Like Nephi, for my sake, I know “I must obey.”³

Joy, happiness, deep satisfaction, a sense of security and divine purpose come, in time, to those who understand and keep the commandments. In fact, it is as we in faith keep the commandments that we come to understand them. John quotes the Lord as saying, “If any man will *do* his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”⁴

Edgar A. Guest penned these words capturing the virtue of doing as opposed to just talking:

*I'd rather see a sermon than to hear
one any day,
I'd rather one should walk with me
than merely tell the way.
The eye's a better pupil, more willing
than the ear,
Fine counsel is confusing, but
example's always clear,
And the best of all the preachers are
the men who live their creeds,
For to see a good put in action is
what everybody needs.*

*I can soon learn how to do it if you
will let me see it done,*

*I can watch your hands in action,
but your tongue too fast may run.
And the lectures you deliver may be
very wise and true,
But I'd rather get my lessons by
observing what you do;
For I may misunderstand you and
the high advice you give.
But there is no misunderstanding
how you act and how you live.*⁵

Discipleship is not about just *knowing* of the commandments in an academic way and not living

them. Discipleship is not about blindly keeping the commandments. True discipleship is about coming to *understand* the commandments and then *willingly keeping* them, because we have come to know that they are a blessing from our loving Father in Heaven. ■

NOTES

1. Doctrine and Covenants 89:20.
2. Dale G. Renlund, “Choose You This Day,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2018, 105.
3. 2 Nephi 33:15.
4. John 7:17; emphasis added.
5. Edgar A. Guest, “Sermons We See,” *Liahona: The Elders' Journal*, Oct. 25, 1921, 174.

LOCAL PAGES

Finding Peace and Healing after Suicide

By Pania Pickford and Crystal Viljoen

Daniel had a way with people. He was a soft-spoken man who never sought the limelight. He was devoted to his wife, Jenaire, with whom he'd built a happy, gospel-centered home for their four children. He served so many people with his easygoing nature, which always made others feel comfortable, and he had a keen sensitivity to those who were ‘in the dark,’ as he would put it. This was something he understood personally, as he'd struggled with periods of darkness and depression.

“He would often roll up on people's doorsteps to see how they were

doing,” Jenaire said, “and often at a time when they really needed it. He was drawn to those people because he understood them.”

Jenaire and Daniel fell in love and married despite their personality differences. She was talkative and outgoing; he was quiet and reserved.

“He loved me,” Jenaire said. “He loved our family and he loved the Lord—that was never in any doubt.”

Despite his goodness and love, over time Daniel developed severe depression and battled with darkness. It became more difficult to cope with



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“The Saviour’s help is complete—He doesn’t miss any gaps—His love completely fills you and heals you.”

as the years went on. In May 2013, his struggle came to an end when he took his own life.

“I was never angry at him,” Jenaire remembered. “My heart ached for him. I understood that being in such a dark place when it happened, he had genuinely believed we would be better off without him.

“I knew that he would be hurting. I knew that the moment he passed away he would have felt awful as he realized what he had done, and the effect that would have on us.

“When he passed away, I felt a strong compulsion and urgency to pray for him because I knew that he would need the Atonement of Jesus

Christ more than he had ever needed it before. I prayed constantly that he would be okay. I prayed that he would know that as heartbroken as we all were, we would be okay and that he could move on. I did that for two weeks. Then all of a sudden, I knew that I didn’t need to do it anymore.”

The stigma often linked with suicide can make the grieving process more difficult for family and friends left behind. Because people knew how selfless and loving Daniel was, many of their perceptions of suicide changed and potential judgement was replaced with empathy and love.

When speaking about the suicide of one of his friends, President

M. Russell Ballard, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, said: “Peace came to me only when I recognized that only the Lord could administer fair judgment. He alone had all the facts, and only He would know the intent of the heart of my friend. I was reconciled with the idea that a lifetime of goodness and service to others must surely be considered by the Lord in judging the life of a person” (suicide.lds.org; see M. Russell Ballard, “Suicide: Some Things We Know, and Some We Do Not,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1987, 7).

The support of family, friends and Church members helped Jenaire and the girls get through the first few

weeks and months, but ultimately it was their faith in Jesus Christ that allowed them to heal.

“During those first few months of haziness and nothing making sense, I felt that I was carried,” Jenaire remembers. “People would say, ‘Oh, you’re looking well,’ and I would say, ‘It’s not me, I’m being carried right now.’ It’s like a beautiful, serene, protective bubble enveloped me so that I could deal with the normal things of life.

“Every time I felt myself starting to break down again, I would just go back to my bedroom and say to my Heavenly Father, ‘This is too difficult and I need you to please take it away,’ and I would physically feel it lift from

me. Then I would say, ‘Thank you,’ and I would go off and interact with people again. At first, I would do this every few hours. Over time the break between breakdowns grew longer and longer, until I didn’t have to ask quite so often.”

Five years on, the grief is still there, but, by relying on their faith in Jesus Christ and their love of each other, Jenaire and her daughters, now aged from 12 to 19, do not let the grief define their lives.

“I miss him profoundly and at times I have wished that I could go and be with him, but I know that I need to be here with my children, and if I’m going to be here without him, I refuse to be miserable.

“I look for joyful moments and try to give my children lots of joyful experiences. We look for the joy in everyday life. I’ve really come to realize just how full and blessed my life is, because I look for it so much more.”

To those experiencing the loss of a loved one through suicide, Jenaire’s advice is simple: rely on Jesus Christ.

“The people around you will help as much as they can, but that help is limited,” she said. “The Saviour’s help is complete—He doesn’t miss any gaps—His love completely fills you and heals you.” ■

Eat Healthy and Be Active: An Inspired Programme

By Crystal Viljoen

The Eat Healthy and Be Active programme (EHBA) is spreading throughout the Church in the Pacific. Now, with diabetes as the key humanitarian focus, the Church has already donated a phenomenal amount of time, money and resources in the way of support and treatment for people with diabetes and associated complications arising from the disease. However, the extent of the effects



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SUPPLIED



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of this disease in the Pacific and the tragedy of late interventions leading to amputations and deaths have inspired Hans Sorensen, Pacific Area welfare manager, to shift more of the emphasis to education and prevention.

“In 2014, no one in our strategy meeting came from a medical background, but still we settled on diabetes as our chief humanitarian focus,” Hans said. “The area had not taken on a task of this magnitude before and we had no history to follow. I believe it was inspiration that led us down this path.”

The humanitarian team had to learn all they could about diabetes and try to understand what was happening in the Pacific. Diabetes is a worldwide

problem, but in poorer economies—and with Polynesians, Melanesians and Micronesians having a higher predisposition to the disease—it is more likely to be fatal.

After the team met with Ministers of Health, doctors, specialists, nurses and other NGOs, it was clear to them that diabetes was getting out of hand. A prevention intervention was desperately needed.

In 2016 the Eat Healthy and Be Active programme was born. Extensive research was done.

Focus groups were held across the Church in the Pacific, and the findings were analysed by a professor at BYU. A prevention manual was written with

a Pacific look and feel, which brought together the doctrine of the Word of Wisdom, words of Church leaders and medical science. The programme gives participants information necessary to make informed choices regarding food and physical activity to reduce the risk of diabetes, while tracking personal progress over the 12-week course.

With great success with the pilot programme and a few amendments to the manual, EHBA was officially launched in August 2018. Around 40 stakes across the area picked up the programme immediately and have seen amazing results.

President Morgan Jones of the MacArthur stake in New South Wales



Even those who are not obese should do the program and avoid diabetes in the first place.



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saw a great need for the program in his stake.

“There’s too much of an attitude amongst some of the members that vegetables aren’t food,” he said. “We’ve had far too many of our members succumb to diabetes. The effects of the disease are so negative, something needed to be done.”

Eager to set an example for his stake, President Jones decided to sign up himself.

“I’ve put on 30kg since being called as the stake president,” he said, laughing. “The wonderful members of the Samoan ward feed me very well.”

With a doctor on hand to test blood sugar levels and blood pressure, the program was launched at the stake centre.

“I got the highest score for blood pressure,” President Jones confessed.

“Some of our members were in the two-hundreds and were immediately sent off to the doctors. It was very eye opening.”

Starting a little earlier than everyone else, President Jones lost 18kg in weight and 10cm from his waist.

“My blood pressure is perfect,” he shared. “I feel healthier, happier, less lethargic, and the pain in my knees, which was just starting to become a problem, has gone.”

President Jones felt that the program was very well structured. “It was intelligent, moderate and very doable,” he said.

He plans to continue the program himself and encourage all the members of his stake to join in.

“Even those who are not obese should do the program and avoid diabetes in the first place.”

This inspired programme has caught the attention of many health professionals both inside and outside of the Church.

Hans Sorenson said, “I had a GP [general practitioner] ask if she could have the manuals for her waiting room; and every time I’ve shared the manual with Ministry of Health officials across the Pacific, they’ve all wanted a copy.

“One medical NGO has taken our manual, adapted it for a secular audience and is training other churches in Tonga to use it. A team of Seventh-day Adventist medical doctors in Fiji want to use the manual despite the fact they have their own health improvement programme that has been running for 30 years. The response has been nothing short of miraculous.” ■

EAT HEALTHY AND BE ACTIVE

A Pacific Diabetes Prevention
Education Programme



Faith and Poetry: Pat Clark

Geraldton Branch in Western Australia is so small, they often refer to themselves as a twig. But what they lack in numbers, they more than make up for in spirit and enthusiasm. There is a wonderful friendship among all the members.

The backbone of Geraldton Branch is Sister Pat Clark, who has served in this branch, and the community, for 43 years. Members and non-members alike speak of her with the highest regard as she ministers to the entire town, regardless of a

person's situation or background, and has done for decades.

Being a great lover of music and poetry, Sister Clark spreads the gospel through her poetry as well as her selfless service.

"I have been writing since primary school," she said. "Inspiration comes through the Spirit. I feel uplifted and close to the Lord Jesus Christ as I go about my day singing the words that fill my heart. This is one way for me to thank Him for His many blessings." ■



*Sister Clark
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In Holy Temples

By Pat Clark

*In holy temples we are endowed
individually,
then sealed together as families
for all eternity.
The covenants we make will
endure for all time,
bringing joy and peace—
priesthood gifts sublime.*

*The gift of exaltation—a promise
to share,
given with faith and truth to all
who enter there.
When we receive the blessings of
the priesthood's power,
we draw on the strength and
grace of God each hour.*

To Women Everywhere

By Pat Clark

*Light a torch of faith at home.
Keep it burning bright.
Even when the journey is difficult
and you travel through the night.*

*Scale the spiritual peaks with
courage.
Stand steady, firm and true.
Facing danger with faith and hope;
for the Lord is always with you.*

*Serve when called. Live the gospel.
Reach out to those in need.
Go forward building the kingdom.
We are sisters in Zion indeed.*

He Heals Every Wound

By Pat Clark

*He heals every wound. He rights
every wrong.
He lifts my saddened spirits. He fills
my heart with song.
He rushes to my aid. He renews
and refreshes my soul.
Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, makes
my broken-self whole.*

The Calling

By Pat Clark

*Our names were being called;
it was time for us to go.
To leave our home in heaven
and come to dwell on earth below.*

*Such excitement! Such joy!
We were going to be born
into our chosen families
in the early hours that morn.*

*Our Heavenly Parents, ever loving,
gave us this opportunity;
to gain a beautiful mortal body
to house our spirit throughout
eternity.*

*We were coming to earth to get
tested,
to experience life in every way,
to prove ourselves worthy
to return home to heaven someday.*

*Father was sending our Elder Brother
to show us how to live.
He was the perfect example
of how to love and forgive.*

*Our Elder Brother is Jesus Christ;
He is our Saviour true.
Our Heavenly Father asks that we
follow Him
in all that we say and do.*

*Heavenly Father and Heavenly
Mother
will watch o'er us as we roam,
Parents with patience and pure love
everlasting,
waiting to welcome Their children
home.*