

AREA LEADERSHIP MESSAGE

Fortifying our Homes in the Latter Days

By Elder Paul Lekias

Area Seventy



Elder Paul Lekias

In President Russell M. Nelson's opening remarks during the October 2018 General Conference he said:

"The long-standing objective of the Church is to assist all members to increase their faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and in His Atonement, to assist them in making and keeping their covenants with God, and to strengthen and seal their families. In this complex world today, this is not easy. The adversary is increasing his attacks on faith and upon us and our families at an exponential rate. To survive spiritually, we need counterstrategies and proactive plans. Accordingly, we now want to put in place organizational adjustments that will further fortify our members and their families."¹

As I have pondered this wonderful prophetic statement, among the many thoughts I have had is, "what does it look like to further fortify our members and their families?"

In Alma 50:1–4, Mormon explains how Captain Moroni built fortifications to protect his people from physical bondage. Please pay particular attention to references such as, "digging up heaps of earth, timbers, frame of pickets and towers."

In the spirit of Nephi's counsel to, "liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning,"² I believe Captain Moroni's fortifications and strategies to avoid physical bondage in 72 B.C. are insightful as we look to fortify our own homes and families in these latter days.

Like Captain Moroni, who did not stop making preparations to defend his people from their enemies (Amalickiah), President Nelson in

our day continues to seek revelation from the Lord to defend us from our enemy (Satan). The digging of heaps of earth to protect the city was a physical labour. Can you imagine the many hours of extreme physical exertion the people of Moroni would have gone through to do what they did? All without the aid of modern excavating equipment we have at our disposal today. The heaps of earth we are required to dig in order to fortify





our homes today require spiritual exertion. It will take faith and work, humility, obedience, love, unity, diligence, commitment, prayer and charity to mention only some Christ-like attributes.

I love the analogy we can draw from the fortifications Captain Moroni had erected for his people to keep them from falling into physical bondage. One would imagine in building a structure so described that the foundation would need to be sure. We too, must have a sure foundation in order to fortify our homes and families and keep us safe from spiritual bondage. Nephi and Lehi reminded us what

our foundation should look like when they rehearsed the words of their father Helaman to us, “And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation.”³

Once our foundation is sure (built upon Christ, the Son of God) we can with confidence build our fortification. What could the timbers, frame of pickets and the towers in Captain Moroni’s fortification represent in these latter days. Taking further license in likening the scriptures unto ourselves, timbers could represent our wards and stakes. We read, “For Zion must increase in beauty, and in holiness; her borders must be enlarged; her stakes must be strengthened; yea, verily I say unto you, Zion must arise and put on her beautiful garments.”⁴ We are blessed to have a refuge from the storm and a place to assist in the fortification of our homes.

President Nelson said “As Latter-day Saints, we have become accustomed to thinking of ‘church’ as something that happens in our meetinghouses, supported by what happens at home. We need an adjustment to this pattern. It is time for a home-centered Church, supported by what takes place inside our branch, ward, and stake buildings.”⁵

The frame of pickets could represent our homes. In the Doctrine and Covenants we are encouraged to “Organize yourselves; prepare every

needful thing; and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God.”⁶ What do our homes look like?

Towers overlooking our stakes and homes could represent the temples of our God. If we are to escape the buffeting of Satan and his followers (avoiding spiritual bondage) the temple needs to be our tower in the fortifications that we are striving to establish. President Nelson said it this way, “Our need to be in the temple on a regular basis has never been greater. I plead with you to take a prayerful look at how you spend your time. Invest time in your future and in that of your family. If you have reasonable access to a temple, I urge you to find a way to make an appointment regularly with the Lord—to be in His holy house—then keep that appointment with exactness and joy. I promise you that the Lord will bring the miracles He knows you need as you make sacrifices to serve and worship in His temples.”⁷

May the Lord bless us as we strive to fortify our homes in these the latter days. ■

REFERENCES

1. Russell M. Nelson, “Opening Remarks,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2018, 7.
2. 1 Nephi 19:23.
3. Helaman 5:12.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 82:14.
5. Nelson, “Opening Remarks,” 7.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 88:119.
7. Russell M. Nelson, “Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2018, 114.

LOCAL PAGES

The Blessings of a Home-Centred Church

2019 has brought significant changes in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The new harmonised *Come, Follow Me* curriculum and the extra study hour in the home on a Sunday are among those changes. One hour taken from the Sunday block and given to the home does not sound like much, but across

Australia, many families are already seeing the blessings of these inspired changes.

**Shiree Ma'asi—
Lalor Park Ward, Sydney
Australia Baulkham Hills Stake**

Having an active two-year-old daughter and a dependent nine-month-old son certainly makes

Sunday mornings a challenge. Getting breakfast ready, dressing the children, finding something that will fit me and be suitable for breast-feeding among many other things can take away any calm “delightful” feelings we may have had as we prepare to attend church and partake of the sacrament.

For parents of preschoolers, an extra hour goes a long way. Our ward can start later so we have more time to get ourselves ready in the morning. Our morning preparations can be more than just eating and getting dressed. Now, in our home, we try not to rush. We play gentle gospel music as we go about our morning so that the children know that Sunday is a special day.

These inspired changes have really emphasised how central the sacrament ordinance is to our Sunday worship. For now, my goal is simple: to make it past the serving of the sacrament without having to take the children out into the hallway. My daughter loves to partake of the sacrament, and I feel success as a parent when I see her light up as the bread tray arrives at our row.

One hour less at church means I am no longer exhausted when church is over. I have the energy I need to continue the gospel learning at home with my children.

Shiree Ma'asi with her family



The *Come, Follow Me* curriculum is beautifully simple and guides my personal scripture study, which prepares me for Sunday family scripture study. There are also many Primary resources that can be adapted to the home. When the Lord gives us a commandment, He will always give us all that we need to accomplish it.

Our society is changing rapidly, and I believe that the second coming is drawing near. We have been blessed with an inspired Prophet and all the tools we will need to prepare our homes and families for the growing challenges of life.

**Emily Gilbert—
Rosebud Ward, Melbourne
Australia Braeside Stake**

I am a very structured person so the new harmonised *Come, Follow Me* curriculum really appeals to the way I work. I have four children from eleven weeks to ten years old, so simplicity and clarity are essential for a successful Sabbath day.

For a while, it felt as though the time before church was filled with getting ready, and the time after church was filled with preparing and eating food. It may not seem like much but the extra hour at home has made a huge difference to my ability to make the sabbath a delight.

We come home, eat lunch, prepare for our home study and there's no rush. I am not exhausted after three hours of wrangling kids as well as fulfilling



*Emily Gilbert
with her family*

my calling in Primary. Actually, since the Sunday schedule changed, I have not needed to prepare any lessons. This is a huge weight lifted during the week and on Sunday. I

am free to focus on the spiritual development of my home and family.

There are so many church resources that can assist us in our home learning: videos, talks, Primary games and lessons to name a few. Not every Sunday runs perfectly, of course, but when my husband and I have put the effort in, we have found a peace and closeness in our home that is so



special. The spirit works upon us as we work together to learn of Jesus Christ and His gospel.

The world is changing. Our parenting needs to change with it. Everything we do with our children needs to be intentional. We cannot sit back waiting for them to be taught by others and hope that they will be okay when the adversary throws darts at them.

*Chantelle White
with her family*



It is easy to feel inadequate but if we let Him, our Heavenly Father can make us powerful and inspired teachers.

**Chantelle White—
Rockingham Ward, Perth
Australia Rockingham Stake**

I love the new Sunday schedule. I have seen the blessings in our ward as well as in our home.

In our home, my husband and I have seen a change in our children; a change in how much they want to learn and how involved they are in discussions. One of our daughters caught me by surprise as she enthusiastically joined in our family discussion one day. Usually, she is very placid, but we have seen a change in her that we know is a result of having study be a home-centred focus in the Church.

These same changes are happening at church as well. I have noticed people are more prepared for lessons and are offering so much more to the class discussion than they had in the past. The discussions at home are more meaningful because they are specialised to our children and their needs and concerns. At church, discussions are more meaningful because people have already discussed the topics as families and have come prepared.

It can be easy to put too much of our time and effort onto our callings. This comes from a righteous desire to serve the Lord of course, but the changes made this year have reminded me to simplify my life and put my family first. These children were sent to me to be taught the gospel and they should be my priority. ■

The Joy and Pain of Motherhood

Finding strength through the Atonement of Jesus Christ during post-natal depression

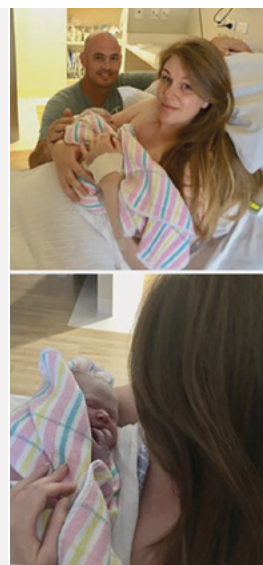
Katrina Stewart

Being busy with a newborn was nothing new to me. I had four children already so I've been around the block a few times. I learned from past experiences not to take on too much when a new baby arrives and having taken time out, believed that everything was fine.

Adalind Stewart arrived on the 25 January 2018. She was a wonderful addition to our family, and I fell instantly in love with her.

The first signs that there was a problem were subtle. I started getting

Adalind August Stewart
Jan, 25th
3.71kg
15:55pm
53cm
Baby & Mum doing well!



heart palpitations. I had had them before, but they were becoming more and more frequent. Eventually I was having them every day. Whether I was sitting or standing, walking or resting, my heart would race. I told myself that I had just had a new baby and that everything would calm down soon.

One day I went out to the shops. I had planned to be gone only a few minutes but lost track of time and discovered suddenly that I'd been out nearly two and a half hours. That was when the panic set in.

It felt like a million feelings at once. I felt fear that Adalind was screaming

for me; fear that I would never get out of the shop; fear that my panic would frighten another daughter who had come with me. My heart was racing so much that I thought I might pass out which only made me panic more.

My fear was the type that you might feel if your car was crashing or if an earthquake had struck; not for simply taking longer to get home than planned.

I managed to calm myself enough to get out of the store and head home. As I drove, I called my husband, Murray, and sure enough, Adalind was perfectly fine, sleeping peacefully.

After this incident I went to the doctor who diagnosed me with moderate post-natal depression.

Depression is hard to explain.

It's a sadness, a hollowness at a depth that I'd never felt before. You can be in a room full of people who love you and still feel completely and utterly alone. The emotional pain can be so strong that it manifests physically with things like heart palpitations, chest pains and sleeplessness. During my depression I was irritable and irrational and lost all interest in life in general.

Depression can change even the most fundamental parts of your

Murray and Katrina



Adalind

personality. I have always been a very social person, but I found that even something as simple as taking my daughter to a birthday party was too much. I have always loved to read but for some reason I couldn't bear the thought of picking up a book.

As your personality changes and you become less and less of who you once were, guilt sets in, guilt at not doing enough or being enough. I have never wanted to take my life, but the relentlessness of the pain led me to moments where I wished to not exist anymore.

In the end, it was my testimony of the plan of happiness that got me through.

To know that there is more than just this life helped me to overcome the darkest moments. I am so grateful that my parents taught me the value of a relationship with Jesus Christ. Establishing that relationship and that testimony in my youth did not prevent the depression but it gave me something to cling to when I was too hollow to feel anything. I knew that regardless of how I was feeling now, I did know that Jesus Christ loved me, and that I would feel that love again, as I had before.

It has been a struggle to rebuild my life. There are still moments of uncontrollable tears but with the help of wonderfully supportive friends and family, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and a little professional help, bit by bit, I

have felt the spirit touch my heart and fill me with hope once more.

Motherhood is a truly sacred calling; perhaps that is why it comes with so many challenges. Even without post-natal depression it can be hard to feel the sacredness of the calling and very easy to feel guilt or inadequacy.

I know in my heart that these children have been entrusted to me

and that Heavenly Father intends for me to succeed as their mother. I know that the Lord Jesus Christ did not leave me, even during my darkest moments when I could not feel His presence. He had suffered all that I suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane. He knows my pain perfectly and knew perfectly how to succour me as I did all I could to fulfil my calling as a mother in Zion. ■

The Day I Heard Angelic Choirs

By Linden Russell Cavanaugh

I was baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on 25 December 1976, just before my 43rd birthday. About 18 months later, I had an unforgettable and miraculous experience that saved my life and strengthened my faith.

I was carting sand and gravel in my five-ton International tipper truck from Inala to a builder at Redland Bay in Queensland, Australia. I was almost at my destination when something very unexpected happened: I suddenly heard angelic choirs singing. The memory is vivid. I remember exactly where I was: the junction of Manly and Wandell. I distinctly remember how beautiful and calming the singing was, even though I could not distinguish the words. Although



Russell Cavanaugh

I couldn't see who was singing, I felt surrounded by those angelic voices. It was a wonderful feeling. Though I had not thought I was in any danger, I felt protected by the power and



Russell Cavanaugh and his tipper truck

beauty of the presence of such heavenly music.

The unexplained euphoric presence remained with me even after the experience ended and immense joy followed me the rest of the day. Unaware of the significance of the event but touched by the emotion that it stirred within me, I mused on how beautiful the experience was.

The following day, my truck was due for its annual mechanical check and service, so I drove it to Rocklea for the assessment. After parking my truck over the examination pit and

watching the inspector descend into the pit to carry out his assessment, I was surprised to see the inspector suddenly climbing back out looking as white as a ghost.

The inspector exclaimed, "You should be dead!" The king pin on the vehicle was broken. The king pin serves as the pivot point which attaches the wheel spindle to the axle beam. The king pin is the most critical component of the axle assembly and a broken king pin is extremely dangerous.

As soon as the inspector shared this discovery, I felt the Holy Ghost fill me and was instantly enlightened as to the cause of my experience the previous day. Heavenly angels had descended upon the junction of Manly and Wandell streets and protected me in my faulty vehicle. Their heavenly intervention allowed me to safely carry out my work assignment and deliver my load to the appropriate place without injury to either myself or the truck. Their divine protection continued even after the singing could no longer be heard, allowing me to safely deliver my vehicle to the check-in point the following day. All of this was done as I was completely oblivious to the fact that a serious, even fatal accident could have occurred at any time because of a corrupted king pin.

I am now 85 years old, and I remain forever grateful for the visitation of this angelic host that saved my life that day. The experience left me with a lasting impression of God's love and of His goodness to His children. I do not know why I was spared from almost certain death, but since that miraculous day, I have spent 42 years bringing the saving ordinances of the gospel to thousands of my deceased relatives through years of family history and temple work. We all have a mission on this earth, and perhaps we all have heavenly hosts watching over us as we do our best to fulfil it. ■