

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

# CHAPLAINS' SEMINAR

★ 2014 ★

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2014

- I would like to officially acknowledge my wife. It's great to have her in my audience. She's one of those people who always makes everybody say under their breath as I walk by, "How did he get her?" (*Laughter*) And I pass the compliment on to some of you.

My mother is 86. She came to hear me speak the other day—I had a chance to speak down at BYU—and to have her in the audience, on the front row, reminded me about something that I'm always reminded about every time I get around some of the senior officers who have been retired, who are always in this room when we gather together during the general conference weekend.

Regardless of our age, the idea is to inspire. We can be inspired by young kids; we can be inspired by the elderly. My mother, 86 years old, to this day still inspires everyone. My dad passed away in 1990. My mother has served in the Salt Lake Temple here two to three days every single week since then and inspires all those who work with her.

And so I acknowledged her. I introduced her to the audience, and I said, "You know, my mom, even at 86, inspires me. The other day she goes to the doctor for her annual physical, and the doctor says, 'Ruby, you need more exercise,' so she signed up for an aerobics class for seniors. And sure enough, she bent over, jumped up and down, twisted and turned, perspired for over an hour, but by the time she got her leotard on, the class was over." (*Laughter*) And my mom's on the front row: "That's not true. That's not funny." But she inspires me.

A gentleman had a dream, and a genie comes to him and says, "You've lived a noble life. We'll grant you one wish." And the man thinks for a moment and says, "I wish that peace and love and prosperity filled the whole earth." The genie says, "That's a noble wish, sir, but we don't deal in fruits here. We only deal in seeds." And I've been assigned by his majesty, Frank Clawson, to address a topic that has been intriguing to me ever since he called. He wants me to talk for a few minutes about how to plant seeds of faith in a secular world.

So I've been given permission to take the gloves off and almost have an intervention. Because of my experience as a speaker, never having been in a military uniform, every single time I have a chance to visit one of your bases or to visit the deployed, I end up being that confidant. And they come and talk to me after hours and tell me things that are on their minds, tell me things that are in their hearts, that I know they share with you as chaplains, but for some reason they feel it's a safe bet because I'm leaving town.

You know there's a terrible cloud hanging over this military of ours that we all love and are so proud of that suggests that if you have any kind of a personal challenge and you go in and confess it or talk with someone about it, that somehow is a sign of weakness, and you may get in trouble for it. You may miss that promotional opportunity or that opportunity to fulfill this awesome assignment. So let's talk. May I just talk openly?

To yank your chain and really get your juices flowing, I want to tell you a story. A preacher's in the middle of his sermon, and all of the sudden the back door of the church slams open, and it gets everybody's attention. In walks this homeless guy, and he's in these worn-out, dirty, ripped-up, smelly clothes with a worn-out Bible underneath his armpit. And he strolls down the aisle and sits down in a pew.

Because it's an upper-east-side, posh, pompous, windbag church, very wealthy, all of these judgmental members of the church slide away, hold their nose, and protect their children in indignation. As soon as the preacher finishes his sermon, he beelines it to the homeless guy and he says, "Hey, can't you look around and notice that this is an upper-east-side, wealthy church? And we have a dress code around here. Before you come back again, I would suggest that you pray to God and ask Him what you should wear in this church." And the homeless guy says, "I will."

The next Sunday, before the sermon even begins, the same homeless guy shows up and walks down the aisle in the same old, dirty, worn-out, smelly clothes, the same worn-out Bible under his armpit. He sits down on almost the exact same bench, and these upper-east-side, wealthy folks again slide away, hold their noses, and protect their children. And before the preacher can even begin his sermon, he beelines it to the homeless guy and says, "Don't you remember our conversation last week? I told you that in a wealthy, posh church like ours, we have a dress code, and you should ask God what you should wear here before you come back again." And

the homeless guy said, “I did ask God what I should wear.” Proudly the preacher says, “Well, what did He tell you?” The homeless guy says, “God told me He didn’t know what I should wear in your church because He’s never been here before.” (*Laughter*)

Can we talk? Ever since Joseph Smith left that Sacred Grove as a 14-year-old boy, we have had animosity to the *n*th degree against our Church, against our Church leaders, against you as chaplains. And you know what I’m going to say—that there is a definite prejudice from other religions against you as LDS chaplains. I see it. I hear it. I feel it.

I was invited to be a keynote speaker at Eglin Air Force Base this past year at the National Prayer Breakfast. And this chaplain picks me up at the airport, and as we’re driving back to the base, he says, “You’re LDS, aren’t you?” I said, “Yes, I am. How did you know that?” Well, the one sergeant who just took over happened to be LDS, and I understand that Elder Bruce A. Carlson had been given the invitation to come down and be their speaker, and he couldn’t fulfill that assignment because he’s so extraordinarily busy. And it was an honor for me to be second choice to one of my heroes, Elder/General Carlson.

And as we were driving from the airport back to the base, this chaplain says, “You know what? I’m a chaplain, and I knew nothing about your church.” I started to scratch my head, thinking, “How did that happen?” And he went on to say that this new chaplain who came in, an LDS chaplain, had invited him and his wife and his children over to their home, and they had connected on such a personal, intimate basis that it opened the door to have a theological discussion without going head to head.

May I remind you that verse 17 in the Joseph Smith—History says that when Joseph was in that Sacred Grove and the Father and the Son appeared to him, the Son was introduced by Heavenly Father: “This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!” He went on to answer Joseph Smith’s question, “What church should I join?” And in His own words, which are published for all the world to read, He said “they were all wrong; [and they] were an abomination in his sight” (Joseph Smith—History 1:19). That’s why everybody’s ticked off at us. (*Laughter*) And we can’t deny those words in the Sacred Grove.

So if we’re really serious about planting seeds of faith in a secular world, may I suggest that we don’t make it about Mormonism. We make it about “Truth is truth, whether it’s found on Christian or on heathen ground.” And in the proper moment in time, because we are Christians, they’ll finally ask us or realize, “You’re LDS. Can we talk?”

Isn’t it an interesting thing? The same Jesus you love, I love too. And the same God who made you made me too. So instead of trying to find scriptures or doctrine that we can teach in our homilies or in our sermons, I would like to challenge you as a storyteller to just look for an experience and, after the fact, figure out what scripture ties into it so that it can become more of a sermonic approach to preaching, because you do quote God; you do quote scripture; you do quote the prophets.

Case in point: I was flying across country with my family, and our youngest daughter at the time was 10 years of age. We were playing cards, and I say, “Alexandria, why don’t you hold your cards up closer to your face so that I can’t see them?” She scowls at me and says, “Just don’t look.” We don’t need a 40-minute sermon on pornography; we just need to somehow have an experience that basically says, “Just don’t look,” or to quote President Dieter F. Uchtdorf in a recent conference talk, “Stop it!” (see “The Merciful Obtain Mercy,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2012, 75). Am I going too fast? Raise your hands. Any questions? And then we can find a plethora of scriptures that will back that up, because it’s doctrine.

How about integrity? I’m flying from San Diego, California, to Tampa, Florida, in a Delta 757 jet. I’m always fortunate to fly first class. I always get a window seat. Nobody bothers me; I don’t bother them. It’s where I’ve written a lot of my books, a lot of my songs—on the road. In a 757 jet, there are 24 first-class seats. I’m sitting in my window seat, about a five-and-a-half-hour flight, and we’ve been airborne for about an hour and a half. I’m on my 16th caffeine-free diet Coke. (I just spoke at BYU on Tuesday.) (*Laughter*) And I need to use the restroom. So I excuse myself—“Excuse me, excuse me”—and I go into the lavatory at the front of the plane.

Now, we’ve all been there. With the high cost of tickets, don’t you think—or maybe it’s not too much to ask for them to splurge for a bigger room. Is that too much to ask? And we all know the accordion-apparatus opening-door system that they’ve installed in every one of these jets—you have to push it in, it turns in, and then you have to turn sideways and actually scoot in. And the lights don’t turn on until you actually lock the door.

So I scoot in, I latch the door lock, the lights flicker on, I turn, and I’m this close to the mirror. And snaking its way down the glass is the grossest, smelliest unidentifiable gunk you have ever seen or witnessed in your life. And I immediately go into a gag reflex. (*Makes gagging sound*) I look around, and I notice that there’s water splashed from corner to corner and there are used paper towels on the floor. The place is a mess. And then it occurs to me: “The person who comes in here right after me is going to think I did all this.”

So I start cleaning it up. I’m like, “Oh, no, you’ve got to be kidding me.” I finished what I went in there to accomplish, and when I came out, I was livid. I’d been raised to be a gentleman, so I didn’t say anything. But to the best of my ability, I stood in front of those other 23 first-class passengers and communicated, eye to eye, heart to heart, man to man, man to woman, spirit to spirit, “Okay, which one of you low-budget bums trashed this restroom?”

I went back to my row—“Excuse me, excuse me.” I sat down. I’m looking out the window, fuming inside. And then I learned the lesson: you cannot buy class. Because of the nature of what I do, I’m invited to play golf on some of the greatest golf courses on our planet with some of the wealthiest, most powerful people on our planet, who think they’re somebody that they’re not because their car, their job description, their bank account makes them somebody that they’re not.

Wow, a sermon on integrity. It's what we do when no one's around that matters. Or maybe even more importantly, it's what we do when people are watching that matters, as we actually live the gospel of Jesus Christ instead of just talking about it.

One of the intriguing things that I've decided that I needed to learn from the Joseph Smith story was the true interpretation of James 1:5. It says, "If any of you lack wisdom." It didn't say, "If any of you lack knowledge, if any of you lack information." It said, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God." By definition, wisdom is applied knowledge, the practical application of experience. If that's not planting seeds of faith in a secular world, I don't know what is.

You see, all the information in the world isn't going to make a person successful. It's like the guy who has three PhDs: one in philosophy, one in psychology, one in sociology. He doesn't have a job, but at least he can explain why.

So at some point we've got to realize that we don't learn to know; we learn to do. It doesn't do us any good to know the gospel unless we do the gospel. So can we talk?

Outside influence from the prejudice that we find in our world against our Church has been illustrated with my story about the preacher and the homeless man. As for what happens inside our Church, perhaps one of the messages that we need to remind ourselves about this evening is that we need to judge less and accept more.

I served my mission in Ireland. I was sent with my companion down to the south, to a town called Tralee, where there were no members. And one day as we were contacting people, this woman answered the door. And she says, "Elders, come in," and I realized that she had noticed our name tags.

So when we came into her living room and sat down, I said, "What do you know about the Church?" She says, "I'm a member." I said, "Really? We were told there were no members here. Are you inactive?" She goes, "Yeah, I'm a member, but I'm inactive." I said, "Do you still believe?" She says, "Yes, I have a strong testimony of the gospel." I said, "Do you mind me asking you why you went inactive?" She says, "Yeah, I could never break my smoking habit. And every time I came to church, the members would smell it on my breath, they would smell it on my clothes, and they would always make me feel guilty and unwanted." She turned away, and about 60 seconds later she turns back with tears streaming down her cheeks, and she says, "I sure wish everybody's sins smelled."

One of the things that I've observed since I've been speaking to the military so many times on so many bases—with all due respect, I just got back from an 18-day tour, as Brother Clawson was describing. And when we came into Ali Al Salem—I'd been there before, back in 2005—we hooked up with the LDS leader there on base. And I said, "How many members do we have attending services?" And he says, "Thirteen." And I say, "Well, we'd love to do a fireside. We'd love to really meet with them. Can we do that?" And he says, "Yeah." I said, "How about if we have a nondenominational service? Could we

pull that off?” And he says, “Well, let me contact the chief chaplain on the base,” who was not of our faith, a friend of another faith. And that chaplain put out a mass text, a mass email to all of the folks who came to the chapel there on base, and invited them over to our nondenominational service, totaling 50—13 members, and the rest nonmembers or friends of other faiths.

And we had an incredible discussion, an incredible experience, because we didn't have to quote Joseph Smith or King Benjamin. We just talked about the Savior, and we bore testimony of the Savior. And one thing that I decided to do, because I am a storyteller—in the back of my mind, I wanted to illustrate once and for all to all of these friends of other faiths the difference between emotion and the Spirit.

There's a difference between hearing a tear-jerking story and having an experience with the Holy Ghost, where something is happening inside our soul that connects our head and our heart, that basically says, “This is true. This is real.”

So I shared a story. We're all trying to get involved in charitable organizations, and one favorite charity that I've had for many, many years is the Make-A-Wish Foundation. What we do is, we raise money for terminally ill children. If this child's last dream wish before he dies is to go to Disneyland or Disney World, we raise enough money to send the child and his or her entire family to Disneyland or Disney World. To see the expression of love, of happiness, of pure joy that comes on a little kid's face when he gets to meet Mickey Mouse for the first time, it just rips your heart out.

Here these little folks are doing everything they know how to do to live one more day, take one more step, breathe one more little, teeny-tiny breath of fresh air. And some of us know people outside of these walls who have the audacity to kick back with the attitude, “Get off my back, Mom. Get off my back, Dad. Get off my back, Colonel. Get off my back, general officer. Get off my back, Sergeant Major. Get off my back, First Sergeant.”

With the Make-A-Wish Foundation, these little kids are doing everything they know how to just live one more day. Wow. Talk about putting things into perspective.

Here in Utah, in the Make-A-Wish Foundation, we had a little kid. He wanted to play one-on-one basketball with Michael Jordan and wanted to take all of his buddies with him so that they would believe him. We flew 10 little guys into Chicago, and Michael Jordan, being the class human being that he is, decides to play the little kid at the little kid's game. The little kid's in a wheelchair, so what does Michael Jordan do? He gets in a wheelchair, too.

Isn't that Chaplaincy 101? The only place from which a person can grow or improve is where he or she is. You have to go where they are physically and emotionally. Only there can you gently invite them to catch on. Only there can you gently invite them to start healing. Only there can you gently invite them to be resilient and get back up and go again with the belief that no matter what your past has been, you have a spotless future. Get knocked down seven times, get back up eight. Yeah.

The Make-A-Wish Foundation started down in Phoenix, Arizona, where I'm originally from. A mother has a little boy; her name for him is Bopsy. Bopsy is dying of terminal leukemia. At the present time there is absolutely no known cure.

One day his mother has the presence of mind to go to Bopsy, and she says, "Bopsy, if you had one dream wish and you knew that it would come true, what would it be?" Without even thinking about it, Bopsy says, "Mommy, if I had one dream wish and I knew that it would come true, I would want to be a fireman." The next morning his mother phones up the local fire department; she talks to the fire chief; she explains Bopsy's health condition and his dream wish.

Turns out, the fire chief has a heart as big as this beautiful ballroom, and he says, "You know, I'd love to help make Bopsy's dream come true. You tell him that we'll be by to pick him up at 7:00 in the morning. We'll make him honorary fire chief for the whole day."

The fire chief says, "Down here in Phoenix, we have a factory that makes all of our uniforms. If you'll give me Bopsy's measurements, we'll get a hard-hat helmet made for him just like the big guys wear. We'll get him a yellow slicker jacket to wear. We'll get him big rubber boots, big galoshes to wear, just like the big firemen wear."

Sure enough, the next morning, 7:00 a.m., the local fire department pulls right up in front of Bopsy's house. They all go inside of Bopsy's house. They help Bopsy get decked out in his very own fireman's uniform, and they all walk out of Bopsy's house. They look like a bunch of big ducks with a little teeny duck.

Bopsy's walking in the back of this long line of firemen in his oversized rubber boots. All of his buddies in the neighborhood are looking out their windows going, "Whoa." Bopsy hops on the back of the fire engine. He gets to go out on three fire calls. That inspires him to the depth of his being to live three months longer than any doctor said he could possibly live.

On the last night of Bopsy's short life, in the hospital, the head nurse was monitoring his vital signs. He was hooked to the machine, and she saw his heart rate, his blood pressure start to weaken and diminish, fade quickly away. Scrambling, trying to figure out what she should possibly do for this little guy in his last few moments, obviously the nurse phoned up his mother, and she immediately raced to the hospital.

But then the nurse remembered the special relationship that Bopsy had developed with the local fire department. So she immediately phones the fire chief. "Bopsy's not doing too good right now, and I thought you'd like to know about it. Maybe there's something you could do for him." The fire chief says, "You tell that little guy to hang on. We'll be there in five minutes. But this time there are two things we need you to do for us." The fire chief asked the nurse, "Could you please announce over the PA system of the hospital, somewhere where Bopsy can't hear it, that everyone's going to hear the sirens screaming, they're going to see the lights flashing, and we're coming to see our little boy Bopsy for the last time?" And

then the fire chief asked the nurse, “Could you also open up the third-story window into Bopsy’s hospital room? Because this time we’re coming in by hook and ladder.”

Moments later the sirens are screaming, the lights are flashing, the whole entire fire department pulls right up in front of the hospital. The huge ladder goes up the wall. Fourteen firemen and two firewomen scamper up the ladder, every one of them decked out in full uniforms. Every single one of them climbed in through that third-story window into Bopsy’s hospital room. They kissed him, they held him, they cuddled him, they caressed him. Tears were streaming down everyone’s cheeks. The big, macho fire chief leans over Bopsy’s hospital bed and takes hold of his little, teeny, weak, frail hand. Bopsy looks up at him and says, “Fire chief, am I now really a fireman?” The fire chief says, “Bopsy, you are.” And the little guy died.

True story. That happens every single day in the Make-A-Wish Foundation. Is that a story about death, or is that a story about life, about the power of a dream, about the power of getting up and going and doing anything we can possibly do to make a difference while we still have time? Isn’t that an interesting word, *time*?

Think about it. Today you’ve never been this old before. And today you’ll never be this young again. So right now matters, which means you can’t always control what happens, but you can always control what happens next.

I remember visiting USAFE, speaking to the troops over there and asking around. I wanted an experience with an LDS chaplain at Landstuhl, and I visited that hospital. Even when I’m not over there speaking for the military, that does more for me than anyone, and I know some of you understand that. All of a sudden, Chaplain Harp was brought to my attention by a commander who is not LDS. And I get to do rounds with my friend—please stand up; at least let everybody know who you are. It’s good to see you again, Brother. He’s been reassigned to Hill Air Force Base, so hopefully we can interact more.

But here’s this human being who happens to be an LDS chaplain, who takes me on his hip and visits these soldiers, these wounded airmen, these wounded seamen, these wounded marines. To watch him engage the wounded was one thing, but to see the love and understanding that he brought to the families at the bedsides of the wounded was really the charge that we were given in our meeting today.

When I got back from this last 18-day tour, I was invited to come in and report. I’ve been so ashamed because when I entered the room with all of these four-stars and major generals and Elder Carlson, who I’ve known for so many years, I basically made it about myself. And I’ve always regretted that. Today I was invited to come back in at 2:00 just to be a wallflower and sit in the back and understand better what these individuals, who are servants of God, are really about.

When you have a major general who is a marine, which means he hasn't even smiled for about 17 years, (*laughter*) who responds to "How are you doing?" with "Who wants to know?"—for Major General Tim Larsen to give an opening prayer and humble himself to a higher power really touched my heart. And the benediction was offered by another major general, Craig Larson, who did exactly the same thing, humbled himself to a higher power. In between, another one of my dearest heroes on the planet, Elder Robert C. Oaks, bore his testimony to all of us about prayer.

To be in an intimate setting around a boardroom and to feel the Spirit so explicitly testify to my soul of the power of prayer, it reminded me that I can tell tear-jerking stories about Bopsy and the Make-A-Wish Foundation all day long. And with all due respect, when we enter the religious traditions of other faiths, and they're up in front with their musicians, and they're having that prayer for the pocket book, and they've got the emotion going, and they think that's the Spirit of the Lord—where we plant seeds of faith in a secular world is to simply invite them over into our meetings and simply invite them to feel the Spirit and allow them to see and experience the difference.

I would like to impose on our vocalist, Melinda, to come up again with Sara and Colleen and sing a song that David Archuleta would sing on the bases as we would speak and sing and make them laugh in a 90-minute rotation called "An Evening of Music, Comedy and Motivational Theater." My job, brought in by chief of staff of the air force, General Welsh, was to talk about resiliency, suicide prevention, separation, reentry, and divorce, to be followed by David Archuleta singing a couple of songs like "Stand by Me" and R.E.M.'s amazing song "Everybody Hurts." And then he'd throw in "Be Still, My Soul."

To see marines with tears, and to see special-ops guys with their beards fitting in with the locals in Wardak Province, after having flown to these folks in an FOB in a Chinook helicopter, taking ground fire and returning machine gun fire, reminding us all that life could be short and reminding me that I'm a twisted soul as a professional speaker because I'm actually thinking, "If we get shot down and survive, my speaker's fee triples"—there's something wrong with that.

So I needed to humble myself, get back in tune with the purpose of our mission, and talk about some issues and turn the time over to a vocal performance that will invite us to see and feel and experience the difference between emotion and the Spirit of the Lord. If I can ask you to come up, please. I hope you knew that I was going to do this even though we didn't talk ahead of time.

[Music]

Interesting contrast. I served as a YSA bishop twice. I remember, in my office one day, I was talking to my executive secretary. We were going down the roster of all the students who were in our ward

boundaries, and I said, “What’s this guy up to?” He goes, “Oh, Bishop, I’m his home teacher. You don’t want to talk to him. He’s a wild guy.” I said, “Is he a member of the Church?” “Yeah, he’s a returned missionary. He’s just off the deep end.” I said, “Call him. Tell him I want to meet him. New sheriff in town. I want to talk to this kid.”

So the next Tuesday evening, he shows up in old worn-out jeans and a T-shirt and no shave. He comes in and says, “Hey, Bish.” I said, “How are you doing? Tell me about yourself. Where did you serve your mission? Blah, blah, blah.” I said, “How long have you been inactive?” “Uh, I’ve been inactive for a long time. You know, I got this girlfriend, blah, blah, blah.” I said, “Well, do you think you’d ever want to come back?” And he said, “Oh, the chapel would burn down if I ever came back.” I said, “I’ll take my chances.” I said, “How about if you come back on Sunday to see if you feel something?” He goes, “Bishop, I’m not ready to talk to you about repentance. I’m not ready to talk to you.” And I’m like, “It doesn’t matter. I don’t need to talk to you. I’m not ready to talk to you either.” (*Laughter*) “I’ve only been a bishop a couple of weeks, and I don’t know what you’re going to say. How about if you just come back and see if you feel something?”

The next week, he shows up to sacrament meeting. I’m on the stand. He comes in a little late—jeans, probably the same shirt, no tie, unshaven. He sits in the back. As soon as sacrament meeting is over, he beelines it to the front and says, “Hey, Bishop.” I said, “I’m so glad I saw you walk in.” He goes, “I thought you would be.” I said, “It’s good to see you.” “I thought it would be.” I said, “Did you feel anything?” He goes, “Yeah, actually, I did.” I said, “Do you think you’ll ever come back?” He says, “I don’t know.”

Two weeks go by. I tell my executive secretary, “Call him. I want to talk to him again.” He comes in—jeans, probably the same shirt, smelled the same. No shave. “Hey, Bish.” “How are you doing, Adam? How’s it been going?” “All right.” We started talking about basketball and a few other things, and I said, “Think you’d ever come back to church?” He goes, “Yeah, I might come.” I said, “Well, you’re welcome anytime.” The very next Sunday, he shows up and sits in the same back row—same jeans, same polo shirt, same unshaven. As soon as the sacrament meeting’s over, he beelines it to the front. “How are you doing, Bishop?” “I saw you come in again, Adam. I’m so excited you’re here.” “I thought you would be.” I said, “Did you feel anything?” He said, “Yeah.” He says, “I think I’m going to stay for another meeting.”

So he stayed for the whole block; he went to the other two meetings. The next Sunday he comes in a tie and he’s shaved. He makes the appointment. “Bishop, I’m still really not ready to talk to you.” But he says, “I wanted you to know I broke up with my girlfriend.” I said, “I hope that’s good. Sounds like maybe a bad influence.” You know, when you put a hard-to-catch horse in the same field as an easy-to-catch horse, most of the time you end up with two hard-to-catch horses. In the human experience, when you put a healthy child in the same room with a sick child, most of the time you end up with two sick children.

Moral of the story: to be disciplined, healthy, and significant, you've got to hang out with the disciplined, healthy, and significant. We become the average of the five people we associate with the most, which means we must be willing to pay any price and travel any distance to associate with extraordinary human beings. Y'all know what I'm talking about. Use a little bishop talk.

The next week Adam shows up to church, and he's pulled out his suit. He attends all the meetings. And he comes into my office and says, "We need to talk." And I said, "Before we start this talk, you need to understand that discipline is to teach, not to punish." You cannot increase a person's performance by making him feel worse; humiliation immobilizes our behavior. He said, "Until a few weeks ago I didn't even know if I still believed in God." I said, "I get that all the time." People come up to me after every single show in the military: "Hey, I'm an atheist. I don't even believe in God." And I say, "What version of God is it that you don't believe in? There are so many and there are so many different choices for churches, there's a good chance that I don't believe in the same God you don't believe in, either. Let's talk." (*Laughter*)

Long story shorter: six months later, he finds an awesome young lady, and six months after that, he takes her to the temple.

Planting seeds of faith in a secular world, in my experience, is to just invite them into our world, because it is different. When we can actually trust Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, to pull through in every occasion, and prepare ourselves so that the Spirit is invited into the meeting and He stays there because we talk about the right things for the right reasons, I promise you there's a good chance that folks are going to leave your presence saying, "I like me best when I'm with you. I want to see you again. What time is your service next week?"

Now, here's where I really don't want to step on anybody's toes, but just to challenge all of us in this room. When I visit a base and find out we have 13 active members—and perhaps the mentality of a chaplain is to just serve those LDS members, and for a Baptist chaplain preacher to just service his members, with the Guard and the Reserve showing up—in my experience in this last trip to the AOR, most of the folks in the religious services, in the nondenominational firesides that we held, were the old folks, not the young folks.

With all due respect, after we made being Mormon cool, when we could stand up and make them laugh and think and feel and cry, and David Archuleta is blowing their minds with these songs, and my buddy Jason Hewlett would stand up and pull odd faces and do musical impressions, it was amazing how many inactive Latter-day Saints came forward, some of whom were in the Utah National Guard. They came up and said, "Hey, we haven't been going to church over here. We know all four of you are LDS. I think it's about time that I went back and started feeling the Spirit that you talk about."

So I challenge you not to be LDS chaplains any longer—to be so cool and so intriguing and so interesting and to team up with your

spouses who are there with you in your particular assignment—to invite these soldiers, these marines, these airmen, these sailors into your home, into our environments, into our meetings so they feel and see and sense and experience the difference of the Holy Ghost versus emotion.

Try and throw out a little bit of counsel—from my experience before I get through flapping my jaws, just share this. I have spoken to this chaplains' meeting three times now. How many of you have heard me speak before, or is this your first time? (*Laughter*)

I've learned a couple of things since we talked last, and I just want to share that. Those of you who heard me speak—I played football for 13 years. One day in practice, the dream ended. We had a tackling drill. The coach blew the whistle. Two of us ran into each other at full speed. His helmet hit my neck, my right shoulder. We fell to the ground. Only parts of our bodies made contact. Our helmets crashed into each other. My right shoulder smashed into the cutting edge of my fiberglass pads, and we slammed to the ground.

When he got off me, my eye was drooped; I'd lost speech; I couldn't talk anymore. I had severed the auxiliary nerve in my right deltoid muscle, compressed my seventh cervical vertebra in my neck, and suffered a level-two concussion. So that evening I profusely perspired; I shook like a leaf; I threw up and cried myself to sleep.

I stayed paralyzed for 14 months. I went to 16 of the very best doctors in all of North America, and every one of them told me I would never get any better. Now, what happens when you hear that and you believe it? You never get any better.

So when I talk to soldiers, marines, airmen, sailors about resiliency, I need to point out my own personal experience that I just shared with you, hopefully as some kind of an arrow that you can put in your quiver and take back to your duty station.

I hit rock bottom, and I didn't think I could get back up and go again. I was a returned missionary. I was at the top of my game. I had a powerful testimony of the Savior, a testimony of the Book of Mormon, a testimony of service before self. And yet I hit rock bottom.

I remember being invited up to the Northern Command in Alaska after a general officer had killed himself, and the ripple effect through that command was unbelievable. My friend, three-star Danny Atkins, took over as the three-star up there, and it just rattled his cage for a long time.

I was invited to Whiteman Air Force Base right after a first sergeant had killed himself. The ramifications that permeated throughout that command were incalculable. You have folks at the highest level experience heartache. Their dreams are shattered; their hearts are broken. Have any of you ever felt alone in a crowded room? Have any of you ever felt lonely in a loved one's arms? I have.

I hit rock bottom, and I didn't think I could get back up and go again. I've been there. Because this is an intimate setting, I'll tell you I even had an exit plan.

You know, sometimes words get in the way. A mother encourages

her daughter to come home as soon as school is over. The time comes, the time goes; 30 minutes later the daughter walks in through the front door of her home, and her mother scolds her, “Where have you been? I’ve been worried sick!” She says, “Oh, Mommy, I walked my friend Sally home. She dropped her doll on the sidewalk. It broke all to pieces. It was awful.” Her mother says, “So you’re late because you stayed to help your friend pick up the pieces of the doll and put it back together again?” She said, “Oh, no, Mom, I didn’t know how to fix the doll. I just stayed to help her cry.”

Sometimes words get in the way. Well, I was at rock bottom and didn’t know what to do. My loved ones and my friends and my chaplains, had I been in the military, guaranteed that they would have come up and said, “I know what you’re going through,” and I used to think, “You don’t have a clue.” Psychology teaches that the average person talks between 400 and 800 words a minute, and yet we think between 800 and 1,200 words a minute, which means no one ever knows everything that we think, no one ever knows everything that we feel, no one ever knows everything that we want to say. The author Thoreau wrote, and he’s right, “Men lead lives of quiet desperation” (Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* [New York: Thomas Y. Crowell and Co., 1910], 8). So no one knows. And yes, I had priesthood blessings multiple times during my ordeal.

And yes, Heavenly Father gave me the strength to carry on. He could have healed me instantaneously, and He did not.

I felt like the brother of Jared. God told him to build the boat, but He didn’t tell him how to light the journey. It was his responsibility to figure out the solution on his own, which, incidentally, also included asking God to touch the stones to illuminate the way.

When we start talking about resiliency, there’s no magic. I hit rock bottom, and what allowed me to get back up and go again was when I had a religious leader remind me that no one knows except the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, which means you are never all alone. The scriptures, especially the Doctrine and Covenants, remind us that adversity and afflictions are to give you experience and to be for your good. And that’s supposed to give us comfort? My next prayer was “I don’t want any more lessons. It’s going to be okay. Just don’t bless me anymore. I don’t need any more adversity if it’s for my good.”

So the question on the table still is, always, what are you going to do about it? May I suggest my simple solution that I’d just pass on to you as I conclude our comments tonight.

I’ve had an opportunity to interact with General Carlson and his amazing wife, Vicki, who behind her back was always referred to as General Carlson. With tongue in cheek, I would always wonder how many years the general actually worked for his wife.

In each one of her husband’s commands, Vicki Carlson became a self-appointed Relief Society president—even though those friends of other faiths didn’t have a clue what that meant. She would rally the women and rally the spouses around their calling, around the mission of the family, acknowledging that when one person in the family in uniform serves, everybody in the family serves.

So today, in the middle of our meeting, we're all talking, and I'm still at the wall in awe of all these general officers and these amazing servants of God who have amalgamated their secular experience with their devotion to serving God. And all of a sudden, Brother Clawson comes in and he says, "I've got Elder Robert D. Hales on the phone. He's on speaker phone." I'm away, and I watch General Tarbet sit up at attention, and I see Elder Carlson sit up at attention, and I hear Elder Oaks go, "Holy cow."

Elder Robert C. Oaks takes the phone, and an Apostle of the Lord is on the other side. And even though he's been running the meeting that we're sitting in and we're all in awe of these gentlemen, he, in that moment, is in awe of one of the Twelve Apostles of the Lord. He basically reports and asks for counsel. And over the phone, Elder Hales simply says, as an inspired leader and advocate of the Lord Jesus Christ, "Make sure you take care of the families. Make sure you take care of the spouses. Make sure you take care of the children." In my experience, the way we take care of them is very, very simple. As I said a moment ago, I just want to close with this story.

Back in 1983 I was invited into the Reagan White House to disseminate Mrs. Reagan's "Just Say No" program, the Positive Choices program. Therefore, between 1983 and 1989 I spoke to over six million teenagers in all 50 states and all 10 provinces of Canada. During that timeframe we also had a suicide epidemic that affected every industry, every socioeconomic department or division in our great country.

Well, it's starting to raise its ugly head again in the United States military and in the United States. As food for thought: the reason why people take their lives and give up on themselves in the military is the exact same reason we take our lives or give up on ourselves outside the military. It's not a military issue. Please don't blame it on yourselves.

I have more in common with you than you think. Everybody's alike: "Well, multiple deployments." I've been married to my beautiful bride for 34 years. Everybody goes, "Whoa, what's your secret?" "I've only been home six weeks total. Why are you complaining?" "She still misses me when I'm gone." It's not that big of a deal if we just get back down to basics.

I was flown into Plano, Texas, the Beverly Hills of Dallas. They had six suicides in their high school in one day, seven in the same week. Some of you are old enough to remember. I was flown to the shore of New Jersey: Ocean Township, Asbury Park, Long Branch. Several suicides in a day and a half. I was flown into Dubuque, Iowa: Hempstead High School. Two thousand students. In the 30 days prior to me coming to their high school, they had 100 suicide attempts. One girl died, the head cheerleader; the rest survived.

I was flown into town with a woman by the name of Charlotte Ross from San Mateo, California, the cochairperson for the National Committee on Youth Suicide Prevention. So as the expert, she took charge and she came in to the student body, took a thousand of the students into the theater, and did the left-brain cognitive

psychobabble technical stuff.

Now, we have a resiliency program going on in all of the services. We have all the experts, we have all the PhDs, we have all these resilience folks coming in and out. If I was on the panel with them, I would be just as indignant, just as irreverent as I am without them being here. Remember, all the information in the world isn't going to make a person successful. I wasn't on the honor roll every time. One time I came home with a report card that had four F's and one D on it. My dad's response: "Son, it looks to me like you're spending too much time on one subject." (*Laughter*) Many of you have heard me confess my sins.

There's a place for the statistics, but they don't solve the dilemma. I took the other half of the student body into the gymnasium, and I did the right-brain touchy-feely relational stuff. We swapped audiences and tried to repeat our performance to the best of our ability, and at the end of the day we brought in the health care professionals, the school counselors, and the school administrators. We interviewed every single one of these students who had attempted suicide and survived.

Every single one of them told us the reason why they wanted to give up on themselves, the reason why they wanted to die: because they lacked commitment relationships in their lives. Powerful word. Do you?

If I asked you what a commitment was, we could have answers flying here and there. It's a promise; it's a two-way deal. Would you agree with me that a commitment is a two-way deal? If you say what you're going to do and I say what I'm going to do, there's no commitment. When you do what you say you're going to do and I do what I say I'm going to do, a commitment is formed. And when the water in the lake goes up, all the boats rise together.

To deepen our understanding of commitment, let me introduce to you another word: *love*. I think about it a lot. How many of you are in love? That's good. Obviously, Elder Wood, this is your wife. Do you know how I knew? I said, "How many of you are in love?" She raises her hand, she looks at you, and you went . . . (*Laughter*)

That's good. Do you agree that love is a commitment and not a way of feeling? Romance is not love. But let's talk. If I love you because you're beautiful, that's romance. If you're beautiful because I love you, that's real love. It's a value-creating love that inspires us to be the best we can be.

Yet how many of us confuse love and commitment with romance and emotion? What have we said our whole lives? "I love her so much; she makes me feel differently than I've ever felt before." "Oh, I love him so much; he makes me feel differently than I've ever felt before." So do breakfast burritos. If you think you're in love, just maybe you need a long cold shower and a box of Roloids. What's my point? "I love you" means absolutely nothing unless we back it up with action. So, the three most powerful, commitment-oriented words in this world are not "I love you." They are "I need you."

Robin Williams—I had a chance to be on the program with him three different times over the years. Guaranteed, he knew he was liked. Guaranteed, he knew he was loved. But because he didn't believe he was needed, why hang around? And he hanged himself with his belt. Are you needed?

I got into music in a very interesting way. I've written songs forever and forever. I never had the courage to sing in public until one of my good friends, Jeff Soderburg, decides he's going to get married. He phones me up. "Clark, will you write a song for my wedding?" I said, "Sure." He said, "Will you sing it?" I said, "No." In the next few minutes he convinced me that we were best friends, that we went back a long ways, and that it would be cool if I participated with him in his special day. He basically made me feel important. Think about that word. We all like to feel important.

In fact, most of us try to act more important than we really are. That's why we have so many people driving around with trailer hitches on their car when they don't even own anything to pull. (*Laughter*) Like, "Whoa, follow her. She has maybe two jet skis and a boat."

I wrote Jeff a song. Two days later, he phones me back, "Clark, the band just called and canceled. Could you prepare about 40 or 50 songs and play for the whole wedding reception?" I said, "No." He said, "I need you." What a jerk. Had he said, "I love you," I would've said, "I love you too, man. Here's the number of a band." But he made me feel like I was not just good; I was good for something that my little weird-shaped puzzle piece really did fit, that I could make a significant contribution. I couldn't turn him down. I don't think any of you could have turned him down either.

I practiced. I prepared. His wedding reception finally rolls around on the calendar. He makes a big deal out of my first little love song. He gathers everybody around. I sat on my stool, played my little song. Everybody's crying. We start to have the refreshments, start to socialize. I sang the first song out of the 40 or 50 songs that I had practiced and prepared, and all of the sudden the band shows up. Miscommunication.

Now, I'm not foolish. I don't want to sit on a stool and sing all night. I want to eat like everybody else does. So I gladly help the band set up all of their equipment. You think about this for a moment. When I arrived at that wedding reception, I arrived with the attitude in mind that I was needed. I would have stayed till 4:00 in the morning if necessary. I would have waited tables. I would have wiped tables. I would have swept the floor. Somebody spills, I wouldn't have waited for a custodian; I had ownership—"Give me the mop, I'll clean it up." I would have sung a hundred songs if necessary; I would have made some up. The second the band shows up, realistically, I am no longer needed. So why hang around? And I didn't. I left the wedding reception.

That is the message coming through loud and clear from young people across our land, from those soldiers, airmen, sailors, and marines whom you serve as their chaplains, from our spouses, from our children. Now, this was taught to us by those students all those

years ago in Dubuque, Iowa, who again told us they knew they were liked, they knew they were loved, but they didn't believe they were needed. And when we don't feel like we're needed, why hang around?

So the most provocative question of the evening is: Are you needed? And if not, why not? And how do we pull that one off?

The nature of our society is this: We cannot afford to wait for somebody else to tell us or show us that we are needed. It might not ever happen. A couple years ago I spoke a couple hundred times, in all 50 states and in 21 countries. Never once did anyone come up to me after my speech and say, "How are you doing?" You don't care. So what am I supposed to do? Just go back to my hotel room, feel sorry for myself, nobody likes me, guess I'll just go eat worms?

Now, the kicker. The secret to commitment relationships is to participate more and get involved. So if you don't feel like you're needed at home, participate more. Get involved. We have to do something on a daily basis to prove to ourselves that we are needed.

Now, for all of us who have been in the high-ops tempo in a deployment, and we're putting in 12- to 14-hour days, and we're in Al Dhafra, wherever Chaplain Brewer is—I saw him the last time I was there, a few months ago. In Kuwait it was 131 degrees. Y'all know what I'm talking about. Take out the blow dryer, put it on the highest setting, put it an inch from your face, and leave it there for 30 minutes and feel it. There were so many folks from Fort Riley, Kansas, so I said, "Well, you'll feel at home in Kuwait. It looks exactly the same. It's so flat that you can sit on your front porch and watch your dog run away for three and a half days." And they're like, "Yeah, you've been there." (*Laughter*)

Then they come back into reentry. Their spouse has been the general at home while they've been the general away, and there's a clash of thoroughbreds. Remember, when you put two thoroughbreds in the same field, they always fight, and one bails, and they're still thoroughbreds. So the challenge I give my friends: when you come home, you sit and quietly watch for about 10 days to see the routine of your spouse, who has been running the show while you've been away, and figure out how you can fit into that slot and how you can fit into her or his routine.

Then as we start to listen and prove to ourselves that we are needed, it's amazing how when that becomes automatic, we can invite these soldiers, marines, airmen, and sailors who are coming back from the high-ops tempo into a minimum-requirement mediocrity we call America, where you can't expect me to come early or stay late unless you pay me overtime. They haven't been experiencing that for the last 179-day or six-month deployment, or a year or longer.

So it's not as complicated as we're trying to make it, and it's definitely not a medical issue, my friends. If we can creatively invite them to participate, create environments where we can invite their children, their spouses while they're gone, and especially the deployed when they're coming back, into an environment to participate and prove to themselves that they are needed, it fills that

void, and suddenly they do feel needed and they're not going to take their lives.

Having said that, PTSD is a real deal. We need to address that. But most of the folks who come back just need to be reattached to a good, clean, pure, powerful, positive dream that allows them on a daily basis to feel the emotion. And then, as chaplains, invite them to feel the Spirit, and together it will sustain them to rise until they get back and reintegrated into society, every day proving to themselves again and again that they're needed. It seems pretty simple, pretty straightforward.

I love the military. I pay tribute to everyone here. As I asked Elder Oaks what I should say tonight, as I asked General Tarbet what I should say tonight, collectively—and I don't quote them verbatim—they basically said, "We've been at war for all these years. And you know what? Commanders come and go, with all due respect, and everybody else who is in uniform can come and go." General Tarbet said he needed his chaplains and he needed his sergeant majors, and without them, he couldn't have survived. Because of them, he and his people were able to thrive. From an air force's perspective, the first sergeants are the number-one relationship that an officer needs in his command.

So I'm here at the end of my remarks to just pay tribute to all of you for choosing to be a chaplain, with the reminder that I want you to be a chaplain for everybody, speaking on behalf of all those who put you on a pedestal, who don't understand our theology or our differences, but they see you on a daily basis, living the gospel of Jesus Christ. They see this natural glow, and they feel your spirit, and they're so curious about why you're different than other chaplains. I challenge you to invite them into your world to feel it so they can answer it for themselves.

God bless America. God bless our soldiers, our marines, our airmen, our sailors. And God bless each of you spouses here who allow your man or woman to rise to that call and accept that calling—that sacred calling to take care of the hearts and minds of our military servicemen and women, more important than anybody else in the military.

I want you to know that I know this Church is true. What Joseph Smith heard in that Sacred Grove as a 14-year-old boy, I've discovered on my own. And yes, we do have the truth. May we share it in action more than in word. I know God hears and answers our prayers; He has for me. I testify of the power of the priesthood, or I wouldn't be standing here today, as I completely recovered from my injury. I know God lives, and I appreciate the opportunity to be here this evening. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

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