

## **VIRTUAL STAKE CONFERENCE 2020 – NOVEMBER 8, 2020**

### **President Clay E. Johnson**

I express love and gratitude and respect for your efforts to faithfully serve the Lord and to repent daily.

Sister Platt – Begins with prayer and a plan – how might we move the work forward if we began each day with prayer and a plan?

President Platt – preparation – day of preparation for the return of the Savior. Sister Johnson and I hope to be FT missionaries at some future time – President Platt – we will increase our preparation for future full time missionary service.

Love and sustain President Smith and President Anderson

As you may be aware Sister Johnson and I have been numbered among those of the Stake who have tested positive for COVID-19. On behalf of all who have been impacted in any way because of COVID, I express gratitude for your concern and prayers. As a Stake Presidency we pray often as we meet together for those members with health, financial or other challenges. We pray for caregivers of the seriously ill not only from COVID but any serious health and sickness. We pray for those good Bishops and their families who faithfully serve and tend to the needs of members. Brothers and Sisters, we recognize the good you are capable of and accomplish as you minister and serve one another. We love you and we pray for your protection and well-being.

I repeat the Apostolic Blessing of President Russell M. Nelson upon all members as he concluded the APRIL 2020 Session of General Conference with these words:

Dear brothers and sisters, I express my love for you. During this time of tension and uncertainty, and invoking the authority vested in me, I would like to confer upon you an apostolic blessing.

- I bless you with peace and increasing faith in the Lord.
- I bless you with a desire to repent and become a little more like Him each day.
- I bless you to know that the Prophet Joseph Smith is the prophet of the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ in its fullness.
- Should there be illness among you or your loved ones, I leave a blessing of healing, consistent with the will of the Lord.

### **REVELATION**

Throughout the day we hear many voices. They compete for attention. Of all the voices I hear during the day, I am most grateful for the voice from Heaven we hear.

Personal revelation is just as significant in our lives as Prophetic revelation!

Why? Because it is through personal revelation, we learn HOW to let God prevail.

Personal revelation provides the opportunity – if we are sensitive to the spirit – the instruction needed and desired by those individuals who desire and wish to let God prevail in their life.

### **ORDINANCE ROOMS**

During this time of COVID we have all experienced trials and challenges. The circumstances associated with COVID need not prevent us or limit us from doing the Lord's work and witnessing his hand in our life.

Let me illustrate by sharing the following experiences since COVID has placed limitations on some activities:

1. Earlier this year an individual entered our business seeking employment. While He left without a promise of employment, he left with something of greater value. During the course of our conversation, I realized he had a belief in God. Recognizing he and I had something in common I asked him what church he belonged to which prompted him to ask what church I belonged to? If you are wondering, the answer to your question is yes, I did use the full name of our church. Our conversation led me to ask if he had heard of the Book of Mormon? He replied no. I briefly explained the Book of Mormon and the truth its contents teach. I asked if he would like a copy? He answered yes. I provided him a copy in Spanish which I carry in my truck. He immediately began to browse through the Book's contents. When I entered the room again, he asked me to explain who the witnesses were listed in the front of the book. I explained the Lord had provided witnesses to bear testimony of the reality of the Book and from whence it came. I suggested to him that he too could be a witness of the Book of Mormon and of its truthfulness himself and directed him to Moroni's promise. With excitement and an elevated voice, he questioned: you mean to tell me I can know the Book of Mormon is true through the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit will tell me yes? Brothers and sisters, he leaped off the ground and threw his hands in the air exclaiming hallelujah!!

He might not have left with promised employment, but he left with a far greater promise. A promise that brings with it eternal blessings for those who will follow the precepts taught in the Book of Mormon.

2. Many of us associate the temple when we speak of an Ordinance Room. Elder Bednar has taught that the Chapel where we attend Sunday services is an Ordinance room because of the Ordinance of the Sacrament where bread is broken and partaken of and water is blessed and drank, both in the remembrance of the Lord's body and blood he freely has permitted us entrance back into Heavenly Father's presence.

Since COVID-19 restrictions were put in place, we have been prevented from meeting in Chapels. But it has NOT limited us from partaking of the Sacred Emblems of the Sacrament. Applying Elder Bednar's definition of Ordinance Room, I have come to realize what used to be simply a Living Room in the front of our home has been on Sundays converted into an Ordinance Room. Since COVID-19 my wife Danette and I have had the opportunity to be in the living room of each and every one of our 5 daughters' homes or to have our children/sons-in-law and grandchildren in our living room. Our living room and our home has a different meaning to me now. There is a different feeling in that room.

## 2020 STAKE FOCUS – CONNECT with HEAVEN

- a. Exercise the Power of the Priesthood
- b. Prepare for and attend the Temple
- c. Forgive Others and Forgive Self

### **ACT**

Brothers and Sisters, in conclusion I extend an invitation to you.

My invitation is to A-C-T:

#### **A – Accept Invitation**

As we accept an invitation to act, our lives can be blessed. Recently while in Virginia visiting Jerica our daughter, we attended church. A younger sister spoke about her mission. Recently married, she was wise in her counsel to those in attendance. She stated: "The Lord does not expect perfection at this stage. What he expects is progression." Invitations permit and lead to progression. Progression means to move from

one stage of understanding to an elevated stage of understanding. I bear testimony as we accept – AND EXTEND – an invitation, we set foot on the road to progression.

### **C – Counsel with the Lord**

In 2 Nephi 32, Nephi teaches that the words of Christ will tell us all things we should do. He concludes this section of scripture and teaches us the Holy Ghost will show us all things we should do. If we do not know what to do, it is because we do not ask. I can hear the word of the Lord, but many times struggle with the application of doing what the Lord asks of us.

In the scriptures we read, “Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings and he shall direct thy paths for good.” If you have sat in counsel when as Stake President I preside, you have heard me make this statement before: “I don’t have all the answers. But...I am confident I will recognize the answer when I hear it.” Seven years ago, we were invited through the Spirit that every Council in the home and the church is to read and counsel together Mosiah 18 found in the writings of the Book of Mormon. I extend that invitation again, that every counsel in the home and church read and counsel together Mosiah 18.

Of all those whom you choose to counsel with, I encourage you to counsel with the Lord. Recently Elder Christofferson counseled the missionaries to pray for an increase of faith. He counseled to pray not only for an increase of faith, but an increase of faith in Jesus Christ. His promise was as we pray for an increase in faith in Jesus Christ, the Holy Ghost would teach us what to pray for. Accepting his invitation as if he was speaking to me, I followed his counsel and bear testimony to the act of praying for an increase of faith in Jesus Christ, the Holy Ghost will teach you what to pray for.

### **T – Trust and Testify**

I have learned through experience of both success and failure that I need to trust in the arm of the Lord and not in the arm of flesh. When doing so I have sacred experiences. These experiences, some of which I have shared today, led me to testify what great things the Lord has done for me.

### **CONCLUSION**

Brothers and Sisters, I bear testimony that the space of time combined with the experiences we have between accepting an invitation from Prophets, Seers and Revelators – or from the Lord himself through personal revelation – and trusting in the Lord and not the arm of flesh – is the period of time in which miracles occur. The time may be brief or could be decades in length but it is the time and space when miracles occur. It’s the time and space when:

- hearts are mended,
- forgiveness is granted,
- families are strengthened,
- testimonies are born,
- the broken-hearted are lifted,
- hope is restored,
- and it is the time when our eye becomes single to the glory of God.

I pray that it may be for you as you accept invitations, counsel with the Lord and then trust in His guidance.

I pray our faith IN JESUS CHRIST may increase. It is not faith alone but faith IN JESUS CHRIST that helps us to overcome.

John 16:33: “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

Being “Born of God” has as its foundation Faith.

Born of God is accepting Him as OUR PERSONAL SAVIOR AND REDEEMER. Our acceptance of him as our Savior and Redeemer is manifested through the covenant of Baptism and personal reception of the Holy Ghost. Having opened the gate and passed through the entrance of Baptism through immersion, we find ourselves on the pathway leading us back to our Father in Heaven. Other covenants found on the pathway teach us of the Savior and “bind” us to our Father in Heaven through His Son.

This process defines the manner in which overcoming the world is made possible. As we do so, we discover and enjoy the blessing of peace and comfort given as our obedience draws the Holy Ghost to us.

This process is the manner in which you and I can TOO OVERCOME THE WORLD – even when we encounter and endure tribulation along the mortal pathway. Overcoming the world is not a destination, or a location. Nor is it a single event as a reward for doing good and being faithful.

1 John 5:4: “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

I pray our faith IN JESUS CHRIST may increase. As we pray, petition and plead with our Father in Heaven in the name of Jesus Christ for an increase of faith in his Son Jesus Christ. It is not faith alone but faith IN JESUS CHRIST that helps us overcome the world.

I bear my testimony God Lives.  
I bear my testimony JESUS is the CHRIST.  
In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

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### President Gregory V. Anderson

In 1 Nephi 2:15, Nephi makes the statement, “And my father dwelt in a tent.” We have been taught, by Nephi himself, that the words recorded in the Book of Mormon are of the greatest worth, it being difficult and time-consuming to engrave the plates. I have wondered recently, why the declaration by Nephi that his father dwelt in a tent was so important to take up space on the plates.

Now I can relate to Lehi and living in a tent. Ever since I was a young boy, my family loved to go tent camping. This tradition carried on into my youth and with my own family and now with my grandchildren. I have set up large tents, small tents, backpacking tents, and sometimes even no tent. I have learned some very important lessons of pitching tents. Let me share a few of my experiences with you.

Selection of the proper site to pitch your tent is important. Will there be enough space for the size tent? Where will the sun be throughout the day, and will there be any shade? Best to orient the tent so the door faces the campsite and campfire ring.

Prepare a proper foundation. Taking a few minutes in the beginning to remove rocks, twigs, pinecones, etc. and smoothing the ground makes the night time so much better. Even with a foam pad or blow up mattress, removing the rock is better than trying to “hide” the effects of the rock. As I have gotten older, it seems those rocks feel more pronounced than ever. Life is very much the same. An ounce of prevention is much better than cleaning up the mess afterwards. Choosing a level place for your tent also makes getting up in the morning easier. Just ask my daughters. They pitched their backpacking tent with their cousins on a hill. During the night, they began rolling down the hillside and wound up with the door underneath them. That experience has never left them.

Now “dwelling” in a tent for even a little while has brought with it some very interesting experiences. I have memories of seeing and listening to my wife, Marguerite, sitting in the tent with our children gathered around and reading a book to them. Doesn’t matter what book, just watching them laying there, with rapt attention on their mother as she shared with them both words and her time was a sweet experience. We have met new friends while sharing the outdoors together, sometimes even our campfire and campfire pies and smores. It wasn’t uncommon for our family and my siblings and their families to venture out together into the wilderness and pitch our tents. We have had some funny and life memory events on multiple occasions. I can remember waking up early one morning to a nephew stammering out the word “b-b-bear”. It would appear he met a bear while going to the restroom. I think it was the fastest he ever rode his bike. I have had my own experiences with bears. I remember being awakened by some snorting and ruckus outside the tent and realizing a bear was foraging. I was glad my kids didn’t wake up, not sure what I was going to do. I did find out though, that while bears like the scent of lemons, lemon-flavored dish soap was not to their liking. One final experience to show that tent camping can be a family bonding experience. We were traveling to Colorado one year and had trouble finding a spot to camp. We finally found a small campsite and pulled in for the night. Being the site was very small, and we were only going to be there one night and move on, we decided to pitch our small 3-man pup tent and all sleep in there together. Now let me explain. My wife was about 7 months pregnant with our sixth child. We had five kids ranging from 11 down to 1½. It had started to rain and we threw the tent up quickly and all seven of us climbed in. I was sure Marguerite was going to kill me in the morning, but much to my surprise, she said she had the best night’s sleep in quite a while. I guess being crammed together, arms and legs all tangled up and not being able to move, seven bodies giving off shared heat made us all toasty cozy. By the way, the place we were staying: Purgatory, Colorado.

Lehi and his family dwelt in a tent out of necessity. They were on a journey. They had left the safety and security and comfort of their home outside Jerusalem, to travel to a land of promise, to escape the evil desires of those who wished to enslave or kill them. All this was done because the Lord had visited Lehi in a vision and he listened! Now, this journey was not easy. They had to forage for food, things wore out (like

their bows and arrows) and they had to make new tools to gather the life-sustaining food. The journey had starts and stops, and redos as they had to go back to Jerusalem several times to gather those things and people of most worth. Then after all the hardship in the wilderness, they got to the seashore and had to build a boat. Lehi and his sons, and Ishmael and his sons, were not shipbuilders. However, the Lord was! All he needed was hands to complete the task, which Nephi with the help of his brothers accomplished. Once upon the water, it wasn't always smooth sailing. Storms arose, some naturally and some because of their disobedience. They were tossed to and fro and driven back multiple times. Yet when they listened to the Lord, they were able to press forward on their journey to the Promised Land, and eventually wound up attaining their goal – they were led to a land of milk and honey.

Our journey through life is often very similar to the struggles that Lehi and his family had. We left a place of comfort and family and friends to sojourn on this earth. We forgot everything of that former life and required instruction and a roadmap to obtain our promised land – Eternal Life. Just as Lehi was not left alone, the Lord does not leave us alone either. He provided Lehi with the Plates of Brass which contained the gospel of Jesus Christ and the commandments. We too have the record that Lehi had – the Bible. We also have the record of Lehi's people and the accounts of their experiences on this road of life – the Book of Mormon.

Just as Lehi was given a special compass, the Liahona, to point the way, we too are given a “compass” to guide us in our travels. We normally refer to this compass as the Holy Ghost. Both work on the same principle – as we prepare ourselves, give heed to what is shown to us, and listen with real intent to the message, we are guided towards the promised land.

Like Lehi, we also have starts and stops along our journey. Things don't always go as smoothly as we would like. In some instances, tragedy, sickness, death, and the loss of loved ones to the wiles of the adversary bombard us on our journey. People mock us, make fun of our “antiquated” moral upbringing, and even persecute us. But we trust in the Lord and his promises. Just as staying on the path and holding the iron rod led the people to the Tree of Life, even so as we remain faithful, rely on the Lord, and help one another, we too will attain Eternal Life, the greatest of all of God's gifts to His children.

Brother and Sisters, we are not alone on this journey. We have family, friends, the Holy Ghost, and most importantly, the gift of prayer to help us along. Just as Lehi gathered his family around him in his tent, and shared with them the feelings of a loving parent, and scolded them when they needed it, we also can gather our children in our homes, express to them the desires of our hearts, share with them the love we feel for them, scold and correct them when required, and most importantly, journey together as we focus on the ultimate destination – life with our Father in Heaven.

I testify that the Lord loves you, He will never abandon you, and will always be there for you. We only need to reach out to him and accept His help. Jesus Christ is our Savior. His love for us knows no bounds. He lives. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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### President Gary E. Smith

I just received a text from my wife who is home watching with my grandkids. My fan club. They were all wrapped up in blankets and laying on the rug and couch. It seems watching Stake Conference from the living room all snuggled in the blankets seems to be the best way to attend a Stake Conference.

This past year we picked up a new puppy. I was determined to train him in such a way as to not have him be like some of our former dogs. Bolt out opened doors, run off, jump on people, lay on the furniture, and a host of annoying behaviors. With the help of YouTube and a commitment to training, which I had never really done before, we have a very well-trained, well-behaved dog. Wrangler is his name. Each morning I have taken him to Central Park or now I'm taking him to the beach, Dog Beach in Huntington Beach, where dogs can run free off the leash and be dogs. In all of this I have become rather intrigued by the vast variety of dogs which man has, by using his imagination and ingenuity, been able to breed. There are literally hundreds if not thousands of varieties in temperament, size, shape, ability, etc.

With that, you can't change what a dog is. The breeding just, for the most part, determines what and how they will act. My dog, Wrangler, just wants to play and meet people and other dogs. He will fetch a bit, spot birds, etc. He shows characteristics of protection. He is alert of his surroundings and will warn me of suspicious people and things, but he would never bite anyone. My daughter's dog, a cattle dog mix, is intent on fetching a ball. Not very playful but just intent on fetching. So fixed that it will drop the ball at your feet. If you don't pick it up and keep walking, it will pick it up, follow you and then drop it at your feet again. Over and over until you pick it up and throw it. She doesn't care about playing with other dogs or people. Just the ball. You can't change this in the dog.

Now in all this, using a term from a dog trainer, all dogs regardless of temperament should be calm, attentive and polite, come when they are called, and not engage in rude or dangerous behavior. Yes, some may have a harder time with these needed learnings but it is expected. All dogs are capable of learning to be calm, attentive and polite. Impulse control is what I call it. We can all learn to control our impulses.

Now back to comparing us. We are all different. You can't, nor should we, expect everyone to be the same. Sometimes in our culture we compare ourselves or expect our selves or others to be the same. It just won't happen, and it adds to a lot of anxiety and hurtfulness. We need to accept the variety. Variety is the strength of any ecosystem. The more complex it is, the more apt it will stay in balance.

We read in 1 Corinthians 12:18-27:

18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

19 And if they were all one member, where *were* the body?

20 But now *are they* many members, yet but one body.

21 And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

22 Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:

25 That there should be no schism in the body; but *that* the members should have the same care one for another.

26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

Also, Moroni 10:8-16:

8 And again, I exhort you, my brethren, that ye deny not the gifts of God, for they are many; and they come from the same God. And there are different ways that these gifts are administered; but it is the same God who worketh all in all; and they are given by the manifestations of the Spirit of God unto men, to profit them.

- 9 For behold, to one is given by the Spirit of God, that he may teach the word of wisdom;  
10 And to another, that he may teach the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;  
11 And to another, exceedingly great faith; and to another, the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;  
12 And again, to another, that he may work mighty miracles;  
13 And again, to another, that he may prophesy concerning all things;  
14 And again, to another, the beholding of angels and ministering spirits;  
15 And again, to another, all kinds of tongues;  
16 And again, to another, the interpretation of languages and of divers kinds of tongues.  
17 And all these gifts come by the Spirit of Christ; and they come unto every man severally, according as he will.  
18 And I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that every good gift cometh of Christ.

We need everyone's diverse abilities and talents. It is expected also that we all be "calm, attentive, and polite", you might say. Like dogs, it may be harder for some, given the diversity of temperament and so on, but it is expected. More importantly, we need to become like Christ. Many of these virtues can be found in D&C 121:41- 42:

- 41 No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned;  
42 By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile...

Now, on another matter, we, as the Stake Presidency, set up a few things for us to consider this year. One of those was to "**Forgive ourselves and to forgive others**". I am impressed with the conviction and resoluteness of your responses to the temple questions. Especially the first few, about having a "...testimony of the atonement of Jesus Christ and his role as your Savior...", a "testimony of the Restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ...", sustaining the prophet and twelve apostles and prophets, seers, and revelators... I am humbled and strengthened by your conviction. You know. Thank you for those testimonies. There is one question which seems to trouble many of you, however. The last question: "Do you consider yourself worthy..." We need to look at this differently. You are worthy. Not perfect yet, but worthy nonetheless. Look at it as a person entering University, for that is what the temple has been called, the Lord's University. Just like a person entering a University, you do not have the authority to practice in your chosen field yet. But you are worthy to attend the University. After fulfilling many requirements, such as ACT or SAT scores, High School grades, accomplishing the prerequisites for the Pathway program, then and only then are you worthy. Worthy to attend the said university. So with that, you are worthy to attend the Lord's University and learn. Think of Elder Rasband's talk in General Conference: "You are Recommended to the Lord."

Thank you for your sustaining vote, for your generosity and compliments, for your faith in us, and me, in the Stake Presidency. I really do appreciate it. It gives me the faith and confidence to perform my calling. It really does. You have no idea how much it helps... thank you.

I have a testimony, I am so grateful for the many witnesses I have had in my life of the veracity of what we are all involved in. Mostly I'm grateful for the knowledge and witnesses I have had regarding my faith and hope in Jesus Christ. I have felt and seen his love and concern for you and for me. It is true. In his name, Jesus Christ, Amen.