

Faith and Families

RUSSELL M. NELSON

Brothers and sisters, I am delighted to be with you on this special occasion. I am sorry that Sister Nelson has a cold and a cough that has kept her at home. I am overwhelmed by this large congregation of young adults. Many more are gathered throughout North America, Central America, South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and the isles of the sea. I pray for the Spirit of the Lord to be with us. Since these proceedings are being translated into 28 languages, we also pray for our translators.

To each young adult I bring greetings and love from President Gordon B. Hinckley, President Thomas S. Monson, President James E. Faust, and my Brethren of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. We thank you for your faith, your devotion, and your desire to serve the Lord. We love each one of you.

I would like you to stop taking notes, just for a moment, and do some personal soul-searching. Tonight you are eager and young. Most of you are students with great ambitions for the future. Now I want you to think. I want you to think about yourself, not as you are, but as you may become—50 years from now. Through your imaginary time tunnel, look at yourself as you will be then. Your broad minds and narrow waists have traded places. You are finished with your career. Your working days

are over—no more time clocks to punch or paychecks to collect. Are you with me?

Now, here are my questions: What do you see in yourself 50 years from now? What do you want *to be* 50 years from now? What do you *really want*, most of all, 50 years from now?

I think I can hear your minds working. Some of you might say, “I just want to be alive 50 years from now.” Not a bad idea. Accidents and illnesses are part of mortality, which means that some of you won’t be here 50 years from now. But most of you will. So plan for the rule, not the exception. Some of you see fame or fortune in your future. And most of you want families.

If Sister Nelson were here, I would invite her to stand beside me. As you know, man is not without the woman in the Lord.¹ Perhaps our being together could help you in your planning and achieving what you want to become. The title of my message tonight is “Faith and Families.” Purposely, I have listed faith first. That has always been the lodestar for our married life: to have faith to seek *first* the kingdom

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of God. We have learned that unshakable faith in the Lord enriches married life and love. Faith in Him increases one's very capacity to love, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

More than 50 years ago we were young adults, as you are now. This photograph was taken at that time. We were both university students. [A photograph of them as a young couple was shown.] I was a sophomore premedical student; she was a freshman on a scholarship. We were very much in love. I think you can sense that in the photo. Brethren, you can't blame me for being in love with her, can you?

Thank you for showing the photo. We really don't look like that anymore. But to me, Sister Nelson is now even more beautiful!

My career as a doctor of medicine has been completed. All of my many surgical operations have been done. Likewise, Sister Nelson has had extremely demanding responsibilities as a mother of 10 children. I forgot to mention that our first nine children were all little girls. Our home was like a girls' dormitory, until our one and only son came along. Poor boy! He didn't know who his real mother was for his first couple of years.

Now Sister Nelson's life has matured. She has taken on a less rigorous role as grandmother of our grandchildren, many of whom are here this evening. Would all members of our family please stand for a moment? I would like the cameramen to focus upon you so others can see you as well. We are blessed with 56 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren. Our newest grandchild is here—only two weeks old. Those numbers are likely to increase.

I considered showing photos of each of our 106 family members. Then I thought of the grandmother traveling in an airplane beside a stranger. Her animated conversation about her family led to her asking, "Did I show you a picture of my grandchildren?"

Her seatmate replied, "No! And thank you!"

I won't show you any more pictures. That wouldn't help anyway. The beauty of our fam-

ily is much more than physical. It is spiritual. No two members are alike. Each is unique and special.

What is most important to Sister Nelson and me now? That we are husband and wife, wedded for time and all eternity. Our children are born in the covenant and are sealed to us forever. What joy that knowledge brings!

When we married in the temple, we didn't know many scriptures. But we did know Matthew 6:33: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." As mentioned earlier, that became the lodestar for every decision we made together. Only years later did we learn that the Joseph Smith Translation of that verse was even more compelling and clear: "Seek not the things of this world but seek ye first to build up the kingdom of God, and to establish his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (JST, Matthew 6:38). We have been guided well by that scripture! I have been inspired well by this woman of faith who stood beside me all these years. Blessings that mean the most to me have come because of her.

Times have changed in half a century. The world is ailing spiritually. That sickness is rapidly becoming more rampant. Temptations to sin go way beyond anything we knew at your age. You are entering a consumer culture obsessed with materialistic goals. Multitudes worship at the shrine of selfishness. Loud voices defend the fallacious doctrine that all lifestyles are of equal value. People want more rights than responsibilities. They seem more concerned with entitlement than enlightenment. Responsible fatherhood is being defined as a weekly visit and financial support. In short, we face a mind-boggling moral inversion.

Against this backdrop of spiritual decay, you young adults of the Church enter the stage. You have a firm foundation of faith. You are role models, both in courtship and in marriage. You know what's right and what's wrong! You

hold the line! You know the Lord's teachings. And you will teach them to your own children and grandchildren. You are the "Hope of Israel, Zion's army, Children of the promised day."² You have far more spiritual power than we did at your age. As you go forward on life's battlefield, you are numbered with "the covenant people of the Lord, . . . scattered upon all . . . the earth; . . . armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory" (1 Nephi 14:14). We are very, very proud of you!

As Sister Nelson and I look back, we can honestly say that our family and membership in the Church are most important to us. How thankful we are that we heeded the counsel of Church leaders to marry in the temple, to invite children into our family, and to serve the Lord! If we had placed our education *ahead* of our family, we would not be so blessed now. Education was a lengthy process for us. Earning two doctor's degrees took me a long time. Then we struggled through many more years of surgical specialization. I did not send a bill for surgical services until I had been out of medical school for more than 12 years! By then we had five children. But somehow we managed.

I pay tribute to Sister Nelson, who never murmured because she had to make do with very little. I recall an experience one night in downtown Boston. We were walking along Boylston Street. There we passed a furniture store. Sister Nelson pressed her nose against the windowpane and asked, "Do you think we will ever be able to afford a lamp?"

Brethren, I suggest that you look for a companion with long-range vision, like Sister Nelson. To each sister I suggest that you motivate your husband to become all he can become, even if it takes a long time.

We have tasted of life's successes and sorrows. We have dealt with disappointment, disease, and death among our children. But death cannot divide families sealed in the temple. That period of separation is only

temporary. Thanks to the Lord's great plan of happiness, we can all face the future with great faith and optimism.

Sister Nelson and I have learned that life is not a one-act play. There really is a premortal period. And there really is life after death. Premortal and mortal portions are but preludes to our postmortal life. Knowledge of the three degrees of glory, as revealed to prophets, gives us a glimpse of our postmortal potential.³ Eternal life is glorious and well worth the quest.

The premortal period has important doctrinal underpinnings that fortify our faith. Then, the everlasting gospel was set in place. Before the foundation of the earth, the plan of salvation was prepared.⁴ It included the glorious possibility of a divine inheritance for us in the kingdom of God.⁵

Central to that plan of salvation is the Atonement of Jesus Christ. In premortal councils He was foreordained by His Father to atone for our sins and break the bands of physical and spiritual death.⁶ Jesus declared: "I . . . was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. . . . In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name" (Ether 3:14). Later, Paul added that the Church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20).

Also pivotal to God's plan is the family. In fact, a purpose of the plan is to exalt the family. The earth was created so that we as premortal spirit children of our Father in Heaven could come to the earth and obtain physical bodies. We are here to be tried and tested.⁷ We are here to "choose liberty and eternal life, . . . or to choose captivity and death" (2 Nephi 2:27). And best of all, we are allowed to fall in love, to be married, and to invite children into our families.

Certain blessings were to be reserved for the latter days. The Lord had planned to reveal

“things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 13:35). Those things included revelations as recorded in the Book of Mormon.⁸ They also included ordinances and covenants of the holy temple.⁹ To the Prophet Joseph Smith the Lord declared, “I deign to reveal unto my church things which have been kept hid from before the foundation of the world, things that pertain to the dispensation of the fulness of times” (D&C 124:41).

“The ordinance of baptizing for the dead . . . was [also] instituted from before the foundation of the world” (D&C 124:33). Salvation was thus to be made available for those “who should die without a knowledge of the gospel” (D&C 128:5). A welding link between generations was provided, that a whole, complete, and perfect union of dispensations, keys, powers, and glories should take place.¹⁰ This welding together of generations is so important that the purposes of the earth and the purposes of the Church both would be defeated if families were not sealed in holy temples.¹¹

Preparation for our mortal life began even in the premortal realm. Before the foundation of the world, each of us existed as spirit children with our heavenly parents. Among us were the noble and great.¹² Abraham,¹³ Jeremiah,¹⁴ Joseph Smith,¹⁵ and others¹⁶ were destined to become prophets of God, some of whom would become martyrs in His holy cause.¹⁷ The manner of conferring the priesthood was to come “down from the fathers, from the beginning of time, . . . even . . . before the foundation of the earth” (Abraham 1:3).

The Lord teaches that

in order to obtain the highest [degree of celestial glory], a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage];

And if he does not, he cannot obtain it. [D&C 131:2–3]

Sisters were given a special gift. They were enabled, according to the Lord, “to multiply and replenish the earth, . . . and to fulfil the promise which was given by my Father before the foundation of the world, . . . for their exaltation in the eternal worlds, that they may bear the souls of men; . . . herein is the work of my Father continued, that he may be glorified” (D&C 132:63). Think of the majesty of that decree. When a mother worthily bears and cares for a child, she not only helps the earth answer the end of its creation,¹⁸ she glorifies God!

We, as children of the covenant, were chosen to serve the Savior. The Apostle Paul taught that the Lord “hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4).¹⁹ As part of that foreordination, God established conditions that allowed us to receive His blessings. Those blessings were to be conferred upon obedience to the laws upon which His blessings are predicated.²⁰

One of those conditions pertains to our need to overcome worldly temptations.²¹ Before the world was formed, opposition was allowed to come from Satan.²² He has always fought against the Savior’s sacred work and will continue to do so. He has opposed the prophets and the scriptures of the Restoration. And in our day Satan has chosen to wage war directly at the heart of God’s plan, which is the family. Signs of his attacks are all about us. The proportion of mature adults who are married is declining,²³ as are birth rates.²⁴ The age at which couples get married is increasing,²⁵ as are the numbers of unmarried couples.²⁶ Immorality and pornography are pervasive and pernicious.²⁷

With such spiritual sickness all about us, it takes real faith in the Lord and in His gospel to withstand attacks from the adversary. I urge you to deny yourselves of all ungodliness, both physical and spiritual.²⁸ Keep a firm grasp on the iron rod of the gospel!

Brothers and sisters, before the world was, the gospel was central to God's eternal plan. It is an everlasting gospel—now restored in its fulness.²⁹ With such a foundation, this Church will not be moved from its place,³⁰ even through the Millennium.³¹ The gospel of Jesus Christ is a sure foundation upon which we can build our individual faith. Some of us are weak; some are strong. We can waffle “like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed” (James 1:6), or we can anchor ourselves with cords of spiritual steel, rooted and grounded to the eternal truths of the gospel.³²

Such faith will not prevent life's problems but will help when things go wrong. Bad things happen to good people. Accidents occur. Some married couples may not be blessed with children. Others may not marry in this life, or they may find themselves married to one who fails to keep the commandments of God. The Lord is aware of these circumstances. He will bestow all the blessings that He has in store for His faithful children—in His own way and in His own time.³³ Be righteous, be patient, keep an eternal perspective, and you will be protected.³⁴

Through the years you will note that apostles and prophets teach the rule. We don't teach exceptions to the rule. Exceptions are left to individual agency and accountability. The Lord knows we live in an imperfect world. He knows it is “ripening in iniquity” (D&C 18:6). His judgments will be fair, just, and merciful.

A decade ago the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, foreseeing this spiritual slide, prepared a proclamation to the world on the family. It is even more relevant today. We proclaim

that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children.

All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit

son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose. . . .

The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.

We declare the means by which mortal life is created to be divinely appointed. We affirm the sanctity of life and of its importance in God's eternal plan.

Now, dear friends, note this warning:

*Individuals who violate covenants of chastity, . . . or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets. [“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 102]*

If you will heed that proclamation, brothers and sisters, you will be blessed. God lives and loves us.³⁵ With His help, we can foster our faith and families. We can qualify for this promise from the Lord: “If a man marry a wife by my word, . . . and by the new and everlasting covenant, and it is sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise, . . . [they] shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, . . . powers, [and] dominions” (D&C 132:19).

I testify that your faith and your families will bring you great joy, here and hereafter. God lives. Jesus is the Christ. His Church has been restored. We are led by His prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley. Upon each of you beloved young adults of the Church, I leave my love and blessing, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See 1 Corinthians 11:11.
2. See “Hope of Israel,” *Hymns*, 1985, no. 259.
3. See 1 Corinthians 15:40–41; D&C 76:50–113; 88:17–32; JST, 1 Corinthians 15:40.
4. See 1 Nephi 10:18; Mosiah 15:19; Alma 12:25, 30; 18:39; 22:13–14; 42:26; D&C 76:12–13.
5. To people of the Old World, the Lord said, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34). People of ancient America were also taught that “they who have believed in the Holy One of Israel . . . shall inherit the kingdom of God, which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world” (2 Nephi 9:18; see also Ether 4:19).
6. See John 17:5, 24; 1 Peter 1:19–20; Mosiah 4:6–7; 18:13; 3 Nephi 26:3–5; D&C 93:7–9; Moses 5:57; JST, Genesis 5:43; 14:30–31.
7. See Abraham 3:24–25.
8. See 2 Nephi 27:10.
9. See D&C 124:40–41.
10. See D&C 128:18.
11. See D&C 138:47–48; see also D&C 2:1–3; 110:14–16; JS—H 1:39.
12. See Alma 13:3, 5, 7; D&C 132:28; 138:55–56; Abraham 3:22–23.
13. See Abraham 3:23.
14. See Jeremiah 1:4–5.
15. See 2 Nephi 3:5–15; D&C 127:2; 138:53–55.
16. See D&C 138:53.
17. See Luke 11:49–51.
18. See D&C 49:16–17.
19. See also Ephesians 1:5. Paul also taught that God “hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, . . . according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Timothy 1:9; see also D&C 38:1–4; Abraham 3:22–26). It is important to note that the Book of Mormon serves “to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord” (Book of Mormon title page).
20. See D&C 130:20–21; 132:5, 11–12.
21. See 2 Nephi 2:11–13.
22. See JST, Revelation 12:6–8.
23. See David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *The State of Our Unions: The Social Health of Marriage in America, 2004* (Rutgers University: The National Marriage Project, June 2004), 16–18 (<http://marriage.rutgers.edu>).
24. See Popenoe and Whitehead, *The State of Our Unions*, 21–23.
25. Jason Fields, “America’s Families and Living Arrangements: 2003,” U.S. Census Bureau, November 2004, 12–13 (www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/p20-553.pdf).
26. See Popenoe and Whitehead, *The State of Our Unions*, 20–21.
27. B. J. Sigesmund, “XXX-ceptable,” *Newsweek Web Exclusive*, 2 July 2003 (www.keeppmedia.com/pubs/Newsweek/2003/07/02/309790). Pornography is big business in the United States, generating a reported \$12 billion annually (see www.internetfilterreview.com/internet-pornography-statistics.html).
28. See Moroni 10:32; JST, Matthew 16:26.
29. See Acts 3:20–21.
30. See Daniel 2:28, 31–44; D&C 65:2–6; 124:45.
31. See Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 672.
32. See Ephesians 3:17–19; Colossians 2:6–7; Helaman 5:12. Remember that a wise man builds his house upon a rock and not upon shifting sand (see Matthew 7:24–27).
33. See D&C 130:20–21.
34. The limits of one’s perspective should be eternal in scope. Paul taught, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (1 Corinthians 15:19).
35. See 1 Nephi 11:16–17.