

**Friday Afternoon Keynote Address
“CHILDREN OF THE COVENANT”
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of the Presidency of the Seventy**

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5W2Goq0f5Y&t=539s>*

Marcia and I are delighted to be with you at this wonderful gathering of faithful members of the Church of Jesus Christ. Marcia and my daughters have attended this conference many times throughout the years, and they always return home inspired, uplifted, and with a renewed desire to live the gospel of Jesus Christ. Marcia has incorporated into our family many truths and ideas learned here. It is my hope today that I might add to the positive spirit you have felt during this conference.

When we conclude a conference like this, it is possible to feel inadequate or think that our family or our circumstance doesn’t match the ideal that we hope to achieve—or the ideal we wrongly believe everyone else has. Maybe I can demonstrate!

When our oldest son was 11 years old, our family purchased a new video camera. This was long before smartphones. He loved it. He was filming everything that was going on in our home. One evening at bedtime, he captured my amazing wife, Marcia, trying to put our three-

and four-year-old sons to bed. She had patiently read with them, and as the video begins, she is trying to pray with them before they go to bed. She instructs Eric, our three-year-old, to remember not to bless the food. Of course, he does bless the food—twice—and his four-year-old brother, Chris, can't contain himself and feels the need to correct him. Family chaos ensues, and well—let's go to the video.

Marcia and I were certain there was no hope for these two—or for us. It was always at bedtime when we felt we were the worst parents ever. So I am pleased to report that these two successfully served missions, are married to amazing women, and now serve faithfully in the Church. We wish somehow the Lord could have told us way back then that eventually things do work out. We needed to understand better the theme of this conference: “O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever.”¹ So, as we conclude this conference, know that with the directing power of the Lord Jesus Christ, the “high priest of good things to come,”² the best is yet to come.

Marcia and I have been blessed to associate with some of the finest members of the Church on earth. Today I speak of the incredible missionaries of the Church—your sons, daughters, granddaughters, grandsons, nieces, nephews, and friends. We have met them in almost every state and province of the United States and Canada and on the continents and islands of the seas across the world. We have visited hundreds of missions and met with missionaries who now teach the gospel in 60 different languages. For part of my service as a General Authority, I was blessed to serve as the Executive Director of the Missionary Department, and I was able to associate with these powerful young women and young men almost every day. I can't express enough the goodness and faithfulness that we found as we met them.

Sometimes I hear concern expressed about the future of the Church, or the future of the world, but I can testify to you that our young missionaries are the best of the best and we are in very good hands as they become mature members and leaders.

They are faithful ambassadors of the Lord. They baptize more than 20,000 people every single month. They have built the Church across the world over the past many years. I have read the scripture in Doctrine and Covenants 133:59 many times. It says: “And by the weak things of the earth the Lord shall thresh the nations by the power of his Spirit.” I have wondered, “Who are the weak things of the earth?” As I have worked with these outstanding young men and young women, I have realized that when they are 18 and 19 years old, McDonald’s isn’t sure if they will hire them, but the Lord takes them and threshes the nations with this modern army of Helaman.

The success of our missionaries, like the army of Helaman spoken of in the Book of Mormon, is the result of wonderful, covenant-keeping parents, leaders, and mentors. I have seen miracles in the lives of our missionaries as they come from families, wards, and stakes led by parents and mentors who have set aside the distractions of the world—as the parents of the army of Helaman did.

You will remember that as the sons of Mosiah taught the gospel to the Lamanites, a portion of them, the parents of Helaman’s army, began to see the wickedness of their past lives. They had been a terrible, blood thirsty people. They had used their swords and shields and knives many times in battle. As they became converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ, they did something extraordinary. The parents of Helaman’s army dug a deep hole, took their weapons, and buried them deep in the ground. They made a covenant with the Lord that they would not touch those weapons again.³

Sadly, these new converts were later attacked by other Lamanites, and rather than dig up their weapons, they knelt down and some of them were slain.⁴ The young men who later came to make up Helaman's army observed what their parents and leaders did. The Book of Mormon describes these amazing converts in Alma 23:7–8:

“For they became a righteous people; they did lay down the weapons of their rebellion, that they did not fight against God any more, neither against any of their brethren.

“Now, these are they who were converted unto the Lord.”

I love that description. I have learned in my own life that I often need to bury the weapons of my rebellion and not fight against God anymore. For me that is the process of becoming. That is the process of covenant keeping.

The best part of the story is what these faithful sons became, having been raised by these covenant-keeping parents. You might recall that as Helaman writes to Captain Moroni and tells of the battles of his army, he gratefully reports the amazing faith of these young men. Helaman writes that even though some of them were injured in battle, he did not lose one soul.⁵

This story becomes very personal for us today as we think of our modern army of Helaman. Helaman reports to Captain Moroni:

“Now they never had fought, yet they did not fear death; and they did think more upon the liberty of their fathers than they did upon their lives; yea, they had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them.

“And they rehearsed unto me the words of their mothers, saying: We do not doubt our mothers knew it.”⁶

They understood the theme of this conference, “O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever.”⁷

The army of Helaman came from wonderful, converted, covenant-keeping parents who

had taught their children the gospel of Jesus Christ in their homes. It was the profound influence of a covenant-keeping family that propelled them through a most difficult circumstance.

Marcia and I have had experiences with your missionaries that have taught us of your influence as you teach our rising generation. While I was serving as the Area President of the Philippines, Marcia and I went to bed one night with serious storm warnings for the southern islands of the Philippines. We communicated with our mission leaders on those islands, and preparations were made that evening for the members and missionaries to remain safe during the storm. As we awoke the next morning, this is what Marcia and I saw on CNN.

The eye of the storm had shifted north and was hitting the city of Tacloban. Typhoon Haiyan, as it was named, became one of the most powerful typhoons in history. Its effects were felt throughout the Philippines. Because the city of Tacloban is situated at the vortex where two islands meet, a storm surge with nearly 25-foot waves accompanied this terrible typhoon. In addition to thousands of members in danger, we had 204 missionaries in the path of that storm, along with wonderful mission leaders and their four young children.

Because of the severity of the storm, all communication with the mission was lost, and we did not hear anything from anyone. I tried to call, email, and text, but nothing was getting through. News reports were telling us of terrible destruction. The storm surge swept over 7,000 people out to sea, never to be heard from again. We were very concerned for the lives and safety of the missionaries, our wonderful members, and the citizens of Tacloban.

This is a picture of a coastal neighborhood in Tacloban before the storm and after.

The Philippines Area Office became an emergency response headquarters for our missionaries and our members. But days passed with no word from Tacloban. Finally, I received a short email from the mission president telling me that he had located 75 of his 204 missionaries. He did not know about the others. Four agonizing days after the storm, and with

the help of our extraordinary Filipino members and my two courageous counselors and their wives, Elder and Sister Ardern and Elder and Sister Echo Hawk, we began to hear of more missionaries being found.

By the end of the fourth day, we still had not heard from 24 of our missionaries. Five days after the storm, we were down to just four that we could not find. By the end of the fifth day, it was two.

Those last two, one young man from the Philippines and one from Idaho, were on a little peninsula that had been hit hard by the storm. Some of our rescuers were doubtful that the missionaries could have survived. A faithful Filipino Church employee took an 18-hour motorcycle journey through blocked and destroyed roads to arrive at the missionaries' home, only to find it gone. The storm had blown their house away. He asked those in the neighborhood if they knew anything about the missionaries. They told him that they had seen them helping at one of the food distribution centers.

After watching their house disintegrate, these two elders somehow survived and turned their attention to serving others. Although we all know this is not the story of every missionary who experiences tragedy on his or her mission, in this miraculous case, the last two had been found. This was certainly a modern miracle. I thought about Doctrine and Covenants 109:22 and the dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple: "And we ask thee, Holy Father, that thy servants may go forth from this house armed with thy power, and that thy name may be upon them, and thy glory be round about them, and thine angels have charge over them."

We provided food, clothing, and water for our members and opened our meetinghouses so they had a place to live while they repaired their homes. Our next task was to get the missionaries out of the disaster zone, which had become very dangerous. Some planes were flying, but our attempts to get the missionaries on those planes were not honored. The Lord

provided a way we had not anticipated.

As missionaries waited at the airport for any possibility to leave, a United States soldier, who was bringing food, clothing, and supplies into Tacloban, noticed a missionary tag on a young man dressed in gym clothes. The soldier asked him what he was doing there. The missionary replied, “We are trying to get to Manila.” The soldier invited him to come and fly on one of the empty Osprey helicopters the military was using to bring supplies. The elder told him, “There are 75 of us.”

So this soldier, U.S. Army Staff Sergeant Bryce Clark with the 1st Special Forces Group, a member of the Church, invited all the missionaries—along with the mission president, his wife, and their children—to board the helicopters. To our delight, the Lord was, not surprisingly, able to do His own work. The Lord brought a member of the Church, who would readily see and recognize a missionary name tag, to the airport in Tacloban with helicopters to retrieve His missionaries.

As we met these missionaries arriving at the Manila MTC from the disaster zone, we knew without a doubt that the Lord loves His missionaries, that He knows them name by name, and that He numbers them one by one.

As the first group of missionaries arrived at the Manila MTC, we knew we had witnessed a miracle. Just like the army of Helaman, every life had been spared. All of us felt like Helaman as he spoke of his stripling warriors:

“And we do justly ascribe it to the miraculous power of God, because of their exceeding faith in that which they had been taught to believe—that there was a just God, and whosoever did not doubt, that they should be preserved by his marvelous power.

“Now this was the faith of these of whom I have spoken; they are young, and their minds are firm, and they do put their trust in God continually.”⁸

As the missionaries arrived in Manila, we had arranged that they could go to three different stations: (1) take a shower and get clean clothes, (2) go to the cafeteria to get something to eat, or (3) use a computer to FaceTime with their family. We thought we could divide them up into separate, equal groups; we should have known that all of them wanted to talk to their families. They wanted to talk to their moms. Every one of them. They didn't care about food, showers, or clean clothes. They had witnessed the hand of God protecting them, and they wanted to connect with those who had taught them to trust in Him. Their faith had been strengthened by their trust in God and what they had been taught by covenant-keeping loved ones.

One full week after the storm, this miraculous photograph was taken of the mission leaders and all 204 missionaries, wearing clothes that had been donated by other missionaries from other missions, all safely back together at the Philippines Missionary Training Center.

Some missionaries had to return home early to receive medical attention. Although not every missionary was able to return, a gratifying part of the story is that, five months later, Marcia and I returned with many of these faithful young women and young men to reopen the Tacloban Mission. This modern army of Helaman wanted to return to the people that they loved so much.

As we spoke with these missionaries, we learned that their faith came from covenant-keeping parents, leaders, and mentors. They had watched their examples of service, teaching and keeping sacred temple covenants, and they had watched them turn their hearts to God, which is how we all bury the weapons of our rebellion and not fight against God anymore.

Fast forward with me now to March 11, 2020. A date you probably all remember. I was serving as the Executive Director of the Missionary Department. Marcia and I had gone to a play at the Hale Center Theater that night. My watch notified me that I should call Church Headquarters. I thought I could wait until after the play was over, but it continued to vibrate. I

stepped out of the play and found President Ballard and Elder Uchtdorf on the phone. They told me that because of Covid-19, President Trump had just closed the borders to the United States, and all the countries of the world were following suit. We had 31,000 missionaries serving outside their home countries. I jokingly say that I went into my Missionary Department office that night on March 11 and came out on August 1. All the borders were closed, no international flights flying from international airports.

Under the direction of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and as a result of miracles, we were able to move our missionaries to their home countries. We had a big question about what to do with all of these returning missionaries. The Brethren offered them the option of serving in a mission in their home country or waiting a year, letting Covid subside, and starting to serve again in 12 months—both faithful choices. To our surprise almost 90 percent wanted to go back out on their missions immediately. In time they were joined by other wonderful young men and young women. They all had been well taught by covenant-keeping parents, leaders, and mentors that serving a mission would bless their lives.

We observed another miracle. These young women and young men stepped up and did something no one had anticipated. With the entire world locked down and these missionaries only working from their apartments, they baptized 125,000 people during that Covid year. I thought it could be zero. They had never met most of their converts in person until they attended the baptism.

These modern stripling warriors, this modern army of Helaman, despite a worldwide pandemic, moved forward with faith in Jesus Christ. Their covenant-keeping parents, leaders, and mentors had taught them about faith and trust. Their parents and leaders had buried the weapons of their rebellion and did not fight against God anymore. As a result, these amazing

“Covid missionaries,” like Nephi, could state, “O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever.”

Our talented staff in the Missionary Department made a video of this Covid experience that I would like to share with you. It is set to the music of the Tabernacle Choir singing a beautiful arrangement of “Let Us All Press On.” I tell you that I listened to this song almost every morning as our missionaries struggled through the Covid pandemic. The video begins with normal missionary work and then you will see the beginning of the pandemic. Listen for the words of the song that help us know that we will not retreat, though our numbers may be few.

[\[video\]](#)

My beloved sisters, by your fruits, we know you. We have seen your children. This modern-day army of Helaman was taught by you.

I love President Nelson. Yesterday I was in the temple with him at a sacrament and testimony meeting and he asked us to continue to bring his love to you.

President Nelson continues to encourage you in your sacred responsibility to teach this rising generation. He has said this:

“We need women who know how to make important things happen by their faith and who are courageous defenders of morality and families in a sin-sick world. We need women who are devoted to shepherding God’s children along the covenant path toward exaltation; women who know how to receive personal revelation, who understand the power and peace of the temple endowment; women who know how to call upon the powers of heaven to protect and strengthen children and families; women who teach fearlessly.

“Attacks against the Church, its doctrine, and our way of life are going to increase. Because of this, we need women who have a bedrock understanding of the doctrine of Christ and who will use that understanding to teach and help raise a sin-resistant generation. We need

women who can detect deception in all of its forms. We need women who know how to access the power that God makes available to covenant keepers and who express their beliefs with confidence and charity. We need women who have the courage and vision of our Mother Eve.

“... It is converted, covenant-keeping women ... whose righteous lives will increasingly stand out in a deteriorating world and who will thus be seen as different and distinct in the happiest of ways. ...

“... I thank you, my dear sisters, and bless you to rise to your full stature, to fulfill the measure of your creation.”⁹

My beloved companions in the sacred work of the Lord on the earth today, you are those women whom President Nelson described. I know it because I have met your children, and your grandchildren, and beloved young friends across the earth and have seen them building the kingdom. As I mentioned, by your fruits we know you! You have trusted in the Lord and that faith is now evident in our rising generation.

Thank you for being that woman! Thank you for what you have done and continue to do to move God’s glorious work forward.

May you and I continue to stand for truth and righteousness and help this rising generation become the future mothers, fathers, and leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ as they watch us trust in God and His Son and make and keep sacred covenants. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

¹ 2 Nephi 4:34.

² Hebrews 9:11.

³ See Alma 24:15–18.

⁴ See Alma 24:21.

⁵ See Alma 56:55–56; see also Alma 57:25–26.

⁶ See Alma 56:47–48.

⁷ 2 Nephi 4:34.

⁸ Alma 57:26–27.

⁹ Russell M. Nelson, “A Plea to My Sisters,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2015, 96, 97.