

AFRICA SOUTHEAST LOCAL PAGES

AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

Sabbath Blessings

By Elder Carl B. Cook

Africa Southeast Area President

I mourn the loss of President Boyd K. Packer (1924–2015), former President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, but I rejoice in all that I learned from him. Many lessons he taught are indelibly written in my mind and heart. He helped me understand that even small things influence the Spirit in our lives.

I was preparing for my first assignment to preside at a stake conference as a new Area Seventy when President Packer called me. He asked if it would be convenient if he attended the conference with me, and I readily accepted. When we arrived for the meetings, President Packer said to the stake president, “You are probably wondering why I am here.” He then pointed to me and said, “I am here to whip him into shape.” It wasn’t long before I realized that he meant what he said.

Reverence Invites Revelation

Following our planning meeting with the stake presidency, President Packer suggested we take our seats on the stand. It was 20 minutes before the leadership meeting was to begin. Nearly everyone was in their seats, and I leaned over to compliment the stake president. Suddenly I received an elbow in my side, and President Packer said firmly, “No talking.”

I was shocked to receive a reprimand from an Apostle, and it took me a moment to recover. As I glanced at him out of the corner of my eye, I noticed that he was writing some notes on a fresh notepad, including a few scriptures that he planned to share. I was filled with the Spirit as I realized

“The ordinance of the sacrament makes the sacrament meeting the most sacred and important meeting in the Church” (Dallin H. Oaks, “Sacrament Meeting and the Sacrament,” Liahona, Nov. 2008, 17).

that President Packer was receiving revelation for what the Lord would have him teach. President Packer’s previous general conference address came to mind, “Reverence Invites Revelation”



(Ensign, Nov. 1991, 21–23). It was imperative that I keep quiet so as not to interrupt the whisperings of the Spirit.

A few moments later President Packer leaned over and asked me to have the stake president request that the organist play the prelude more reverently. She had been playing energetically and perhaps with some added fanfare. I prayed in my heart that she would not be hurt by the request, and I passed the word on. The stake president somewhat hesitatingly spoke to the sister and almost immediately the volume, tempo, and spirit of the music changed. As I listened to the prelude, I was reminded that reverent, worshipful music adds immeasurably to the spirit of a meeting.

As the congregation began singing the opening hymn, President Packer whispered to me, “Not everyone is singing. Please have the stake president stop the hymn and invite

“Music is of enormous importance in our worship services . . . [Music] can set an atmosphere of worship which invites that spirit of revelation, of testimony.” (Boyd K. Packer, “Reverence Invites Revelation,” Ensign, Nov. 1991, 21–23.)



Elder Carl B. Cook

“When we meet to learn the doctrines of the gospel, it should be in a spirit of reverence . . .

“Inspiration comes more easily in peaceful settings.” (Boyd K. Packer, “Reverence Invites Revelation,” Ensign, Nov. 1991, 21–23)

everyone to sing the hymn ‘*thoughtfully*’ as suggested in the hymn book. This hymn communicates an important message that we will be learning about today.” Once again I passed the message on to the stake president. The spirit of the meeting changed as the entire congregation participated in singing.

Our meetings that weekend were reverent. There was a spirit of worship. Many of us received personal revelation and communed with God. I learned that reverence truly does invite revelation. I also learned that sometimes the difference between a mediocre meeting and a powerful meeting is in the planning and in the details.

Sabbath Day Worship

We recently received similar counsel and instruction regarding reverence and Sabbath day worship from our current leaders. We are encouraged to apply these principles in our Church meetings (particularly sacrament meeting) and in our homes. As we follow their counsel, we can receive the promised blessings of spiritual and physical renewal, joy and rejoicing, increased love for God, and the blessings of the earth (see Russell M. Nelson, “The Sabbath Is a Delight,” *Liahona*, May 2015, 129, 130).

Since I accepted the invitation to improve my Sabbath day observance, my faith has increased, and I feel closer to my Father in Heaven. The

Sabbath truly has been a delight. I am also benefitting from the efforts of others who are striving to improve, particularly during Church meetings.

Recently, local priesthood leaders were encouraged to make the Sabbath and sacrament meeting a more spiritual experience by planning ahead for meetings and reducing

“We should sing the songs of Zion—they are an essential part of our worship.” (Boyd K. Packer, “Reverence Invites Revelation,” Ensign, Nov. 1991, 21–23).

administrative matters. They were also encouraged to hold sacrament meeting first in the three-hour Sabbath meeting schedule.

Shortly after this counsel was given, I attended sacrament meeting. Fifteen minutes before the meeting began, the chapel was nearly full. The organist was playing a beautiful prelude of hymns. Priesthood leaders were

“When we step into the chapel, we must!—each of us must—watch ourselves lest we be guilty of intruding when someone is struggling to feel delicate spiritual communications.” (Boyd K. Packer, “Reverence Invites Revelation,” Ensign, Nov. 1991, 21–23)

seated reverently on the stand. The sacrament was in place and ready. Members sat quietly, including the children. I felt the Spirit. I was filled with joy as I united with my brothers and sisters and enjoyed the fruits of following the counsel of our prophets. I felt unity with them and with God.

I invite you to consider how you might more fully keep the Sabbath day holy, both at home and at church, both personally and as a family, and reap the associated blessings. Following are a few suggestions:

- Prayerfully consider what you can do differently in your personal worship.
- Counsel together as a family regarding possible improvements to Sabbath observance.
- Organize and prepare food, clothing, and other necessities prior to Sunday.
- Leave digital devices at home or turned off at church.
- Arrive early for meetings in a spirit of reverence.
- Assist children in the family to be reverent without toys or food that distracts.
- Counsel together as leaders in the Church. Seek inspiration and plan well in advance for meetings that will invite the Spirit.
- When participating in meetings, focus on the foundational doctrines of the gospel and bear pure testimony.

I know as we appropriately observe the Sabbath, our faith can increase. We can be strengthened to endure challenges. We can receive help in

solving our problems. We can feel our Father in Heaven's love for us. We can draw closer to Him and receive His blessings. ■

God promises us joy equal to our obedience when we keep His laws, listen to them, learn them, and put them into practice. So, obedience is to do the will of our Heavenly Father, and we are nourished when we follow His ways (see 1 Nephi 17:3).

LOCAL PRIESTHOOD LEADERS

Obedience and Sacrifice Qualify Us for Exaltation

By Elder W. Jean-Pierre Lono

In this dispensation, obedience followed by sacrifice is critical to our salvation, and the spirit of sacrifice is a special blessing to those with broken hearts and contrite spirits. We Latter-day Saints seek to learn how we can be blessed each day by Heavenly Father and to find an abiding personal testimony of the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Dear brothers and sisters, only faith coupled with works can bring us the greatest blessings in this life and in the eternities.

President Thomas S. Monson said: "The knowledge which we seek, the answers for which we yearn, and the strength which we desire today to meet the challenges of a complex and changing world can be ours when we willingly obey the Lord's commandments. I quote once again the words of the Lord: 'He that keepeth [God's]

commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things.'"¹

What do we mean by living a life of devotion and obedience? First, in a spiritual sense, we sacrifice by obeying all that Heavenly Father commands. Where and when do we do this? We seek to do Heavenly Father's will in our daily lives, in our homes, at church, and in our communities. The world should see in us a reflection of the image of Christ because, in obeying Him, we receive

Elder

W. Jean-Pierre Lono



Abraham Taking Isaac to be Sacrificed, by Del Parson.

His Spirit. We do what pleases Him, and we become that which He wishes us to be, even as He is. Those who have obeyed have received great blessings because these blessings are linked to promises. Abraham obeyed by sacrificing his son Isaac without judging God, and today he is the father of nations. Noah carried out the instructions he received from God and saved his family. Joseph Smith, son of a humble family, could have



sold the golden plates to gain wealth and honor, but instead, his sacrifice helped to save humanity from God's anger and to bring exaltation to many generations. In like manner, many other Saints today obey and sacrifice by faithfully living the gospel to save their own souls and those of their family members.

Sacrifice means to give the Lord all that He requires of our time, our means, and our being.

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, while teaching at a multi-stake conference in Africa on November 23, 2014, said: "For a man to give up all: self, reputation, honor, fame, goods, brothers, sisters, wife, children, and his own life . . . requires more than to simply believe that he is doing God's will. Our promise is, 'I will give the Lord all that I have, and I am willing to die for the gospel of Jesus Christ.'

"Thus we see that sacrifice motivated by faith and hope produces a great change in our life and a desire to obey God and to serve in His Church."

Alma asks, "And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?" (Alma 5:14). Then, of heads of families, of family members, and of Church leaders, Alma

asks: "I say unto you, can ye think of being saved when you have yielded yourselves to become subjects to the devil?"

"I say unto you, ye will know at that day that ye cannot be saved; for there can no man be saved except his garments are washed white; . . . purified . . . cleansed from all stain, through the blood of [our Savior]" (Alma 5:20–21). And then you will be saved by the infinite grace of a good and loving God. The day of our repentance is today.

Very often the devil shows us his delights, his intention being to catch the eye and tug at the heart, pitting our faith against his seductions, be it gold and silver, honor and success, triumph, tribalism, effortless miracles, influence, the power to walk over those under us—in short, he causes us to believe the opposite of 3 Nephi 13:33 which remind us: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." We have been counseled in Matthew and John, "Let not your heart be troubled" (John 14:1) . . . "for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things" (Matthew 6:32). We have the great promise in Matthew 16:19, "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." Then at the end, the King shall say unto His obedient people, "Inherit the kingdom [because of your obedience and sacrifices for Me and others] prepared

LOCAL NEWS

Beautiful Building in His Dream

By Anthony Uzodimma Obinna

Anthony Obinna was raised in a very traditional African family and had little knowledge of Christianity. However, in early 1966, he had a dream in which he was visited by a personage who took him to a beautiful building and showed him everything in it.

One day, he picked up an old September 1958 copy of *Reader's Digest*. He opened it and saw a picture of the same beautiful building he had been shown in his dream. The heading was "The March of the Mormons." He had never heard the word "Mormons" before, but he started to read the story because of the picture of the building.



ANTHONY OBINNA, EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG

First black branch president in Africa



Sacrifice means to give the Lord all that He requires of our time, our means, and our being.

Here are some of the priorities we can demonstrate to show our love for Heavenly Father: keep the Sabbath day holy, prepare to perform priesthood ordinances, become active in doing family history, counsel together at church and at home, follow the Savior's example as a good shepherd, and prepare to partake of the sacrament worthily. These are the things which draw us nearer to our Savior.

I testify that the Restoration of the gospel is a blessing to me, my wife, our children, and our forebears. I know with all my heart that without humility, which is born of obedience, and because of Christ's redeeming sacrifice, humans would not have the possibility of exaltation. We truly have a representative of our Father in Heaven in Thomas S. Monson, the living prophet, seer, and revelator, and in the twelve obedient and devoted men who have been called as Apostles in our day. I sustain them and love them with all my heart. ■

NOTE

1. Thomas S. Monson, "Obedience Brings Blessings," *Liahona*, May 2013, 92.

for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

What sacrifice ought we to offer by our obedience to God? It should be that of serving His sons and daughters today with a broken heart and a contrite spirit. He says to His children, "Therefore, O ye that embark in the service of God, see that ye serve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day" (Doctrine & Covenants 4:2).

"And no one can assist in this work except he shall be humble and full of love [toward God and his fellow man,] having faith, hope, and charity, being temperate in all things, whatsoever shall be entrusted to his care" (Doctrine & Covenants 12:8).

This act, this attitude, this performance of all sacrifice for and in the Lord, serves to make a man holy if, and only if, he gives up the pleasures of the world in behalf of others, as did Jesus Christ.

He discovered that the article was all about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Brother Obinna stated: "From the time I finished reading the story, I had no peace of mind any longer. My whole attention was focused on my new discovery. I rushed out immediately to tell my brothers, who were all astonished to hear the story."

In 1971 he wrote a letter to the headquarters of the Church for instructions. Pamphlets, tracts, and a Book of Mormon were sent to him. But he was advised that there was no authority to organize the Church in Nigeria at that time.

Brother Obinna reported: "Persecutions, name calling, and all kinds of abuses were rendered to me. I was persecuted in various ways but I kept deaf ears. I knew I had discovered the truth, and men's threats could not move me and my group. So we continued asking God to open the door for us.

"We were given a program to follow on Sundays. We continued praying always, until the 21st of November, 1978, when the Church was officially opened for the black race (in Africa) with the authority to hold the priesthood and administer the ordinances thereof."

Nineteen members were baptized on the above date, and the Aboh Branch was organized, with Anthony Obinna as president, his brothers Francis and Raymond as

his counselors, and his wife Fidelia as Relief Society president. Brother Obinna was the first black branch president in Africa, and the Aboh Branch was the first official native branch organized in black Africa. The new branch presidency promptly reported the event in a jubilant letter to the First Presidency:

*"Dear Brethren,
"The entire members of
The Church of Jesus Christ of
Latter-day Saints in this part
of Nigeria have the pleasure to
thank you and the Latter-day
Saints throughout the world for
opening the door for the gospel to
come to our people in its fulness.*

*"We are happy for the many
hours in the upper room of the
temple you spent supplicating the
Lord to bring us into the fold. We
thank our Heavenly Father for
hearing your prayers and ours
and by revelation has confirmed
the long promised day and has
granted the holy priesthood to
us, with the power to exercise its
divine authority and enjoy every
blessings of the temple. . . .*

*"There is no doubt that the
Church here will grow and
become a mighty centre for
the Saints and bring progress
enough to the people of Nigeria
as it is doing all over the world."*

Brother Obinna further testified to all the world: "The most important [discussions] and love in my house are about 'our Church.' As Christ is guarding His true Church, membership is increasing daily, and I testify that in the future, the membership of the Church will be as great as the sands on the seashore. God is great and performs wonders. No human power can withhold God's work in this world." ■

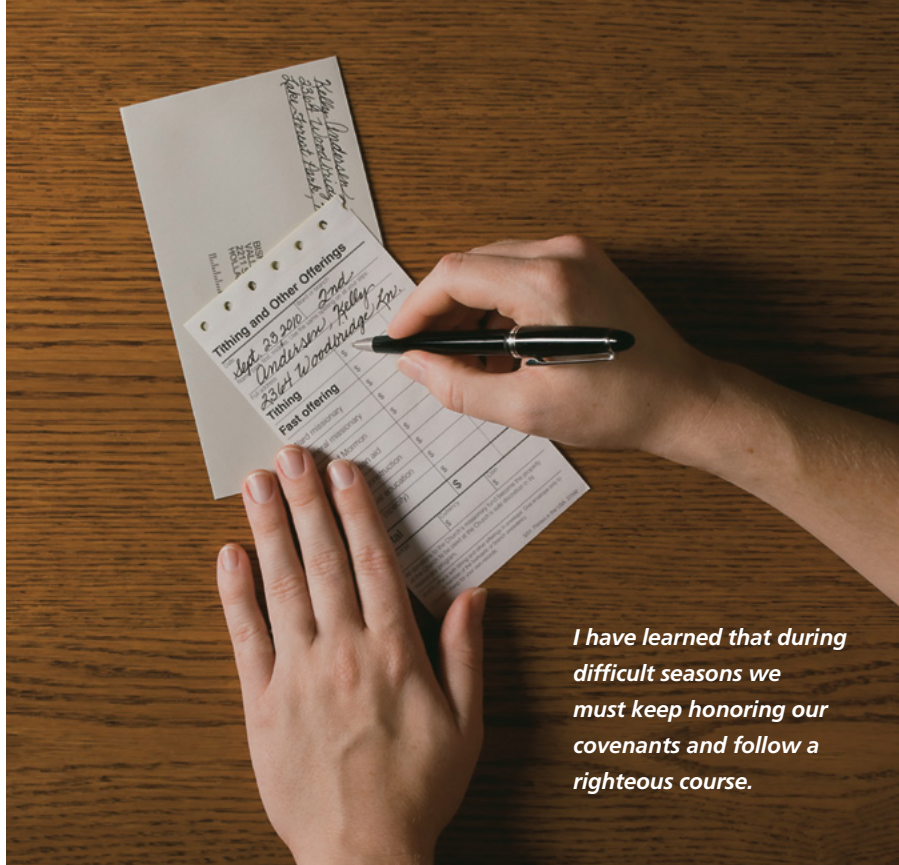
Excerpted by Marnae Wilson from "Voice from Nigeria," Anthony Uzodimma Obinna, Ensign, December, 1980.

Timid about Tithing

By Cathrin Bantjes

I admire people who stand up in testimony meeting and bear witness of the blessings that come from paying tithing. My husband and I had always paid our tithing, but until a few months ago we would just forget about it as soon as we'd mailed the check to our bishop.

Recently, however, I learned the importance of tithing when my husband, Victor, lost his job. My income was sufficient to buy our food, but not to pay our mortgage. When Victor handed me his severance pay, I hesitated to pay tithing on it. What if Victor couldn't get another job right away? Where would we live if we couldn't keep up with our mortgage payments?



I have learned that during difficult seasons we must keep honoring our covenants and follow a righteous course.

Band of Brothers

By Elder Mark and Sister Shirley Taylor

In 2010 the Lord gathered a smallish “army of Helaman” from the Mochudi Branch of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Botswana. Twelve young men who had been friends (as well as partners in mischief) helped each other find the gospel. They later supported each other as they prepared to serve missions. Each of these young men were the only members of the Church in their families, so they joined together to form a Church family they called “The Band of Brothers.”

It all started when two missionaries from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints gave one of them a pass-along card with a picture of the Book of Mormon on it. The teenager felt a great desire to learn more about the book and asked the missionaries if they would sell one to him. The missionaries replied, “We’ll give you the book for free if you come to church on Sunday!”

The teenager failed to make it to church on the following Sunday and assumed the missionaries would be disgusted with him. Much to his surprise, he said, “The next week those same two guys showed up at my door smiling at me like I was an old friend!” The elders began to teach him. When he first heard the Joseph Smith story, he said, “It was

For the first time in my life, I needed confirmation that paying tithing was the right thing to do. I reviewed 3 Nephi 24:8–12. I read, “And prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (3 Nephi 24:10). Then I turned to Doctrine and Covenants 82:10: “I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise.”

After much prayer and soul searching, I paid the tithing on Victor’s severance pay. Upon inquiring, we were happy to learn that we had six months of breathing room on our mortgage. Getting a new job, however, proved difficult. As Victor traveled the length and breadth of South Africa’s Transvaal Province, he was told that he was “too old,” “overqualified,” “overpaid,” or that he had the “wrong background.”

Finally, a placement agency scheduled him for an interview at a large mining company. On the day of his visit, the company put Victor through a gruelling series of allergy tests in addition to all the usual screening requirements. I fasted and prayed all that day long.

Two days later, he was offered the job. When we drove down to sign the employment papers, the company showed us a lovely home that was included in the compensation package.

Sometimes it is tempting to stop paying tithing when our financial circumstances worsen. But I have learned that during difficult seasons we must keep honoring our covenants and follow a righteous course. By enduring in paying our tithes, Victor and I survived adversity and were flooded with more blessings than we had ever received before. ■

“Flooded with Blessings,” Cathrin Bantjes, Ensign, April, 1994.

like I already knew it. It was like everything they were telling me was already within me—just a reawakening. I was hit by the truth, and I never looked back.”

He told another friend about the gospel, and soon some of the new investigators began carrying the Book of Mormon to school. He explained, “My friend seemed to change at the snap of a finger. I thought it had something to do with that black book he started carrying around at school. I could see what a good man he had become, but I also remembered the bad things that he had done in the past. A part of me really wanted to change, as well.”

As the band grew, so did its influence on the young men. One explained, “For me, the weekend was the best time of the week because I knew I was going to meet up with my brothers. We boys didn’t have a lot of material possessions, and we had our own fair share of challenges, but our level of enthusiasm toward the gospel of Jesus Christ was remarkable.”

Another young man added, “We all had the spirit of missionary work and were getting anxious to serve officially. We had a little competition going as to who would serve first. We prepared by getting together and studying our scriptures and having gospel discussions.”

Many of the “Band of Brothers” are now serving missions, and they still strengthen each other from a distance. One explained, “Sometimes when things get a little rough here in the mission, I read my brothers’ testimonies, and it takes me back to the Spirit I felt when I was with them.”

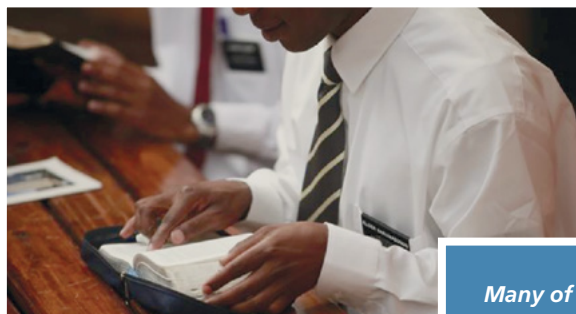
Another missionary contributes, “I was the first of the Band of Brothers to leave on a mission. Hearing how my fellow brothers are now following the gospel and are going on missions

gives me great hope and faith in times of trial because I know I am not alone.”

Even though these young elders have little support from their non-member families, on preparation days they email each other and chat online to influence each other to remain faithful and valiant. One was speaking for the entire group of 12 when he said, “This group we call the Band of Brothers has become my family. We were placed here on earth at the same time and place so we could be together and strengthen each other.”

Their influence on each other will be felt for generations. ■

Excerpted by Marnae Wilson from The Band of Brothers, compiled by Elder Mark and Sister Shirley Taylor of the South Africa Johannesburg Mission.



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