Using a Spiritual Model to Transport Us Through Life's Passages

Elder Joe J. Christensen

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/irp

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/irp/vol25/iss1/7

This Article or Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
Using a Spiritual Model to Transport Us Through Life’s Passages

Elder Joe J. Christensen
First Quorum of the Seventy
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

To begin, I would like to invite you to utilize the miracle of imagination and transport yourselves to the Holy Land north of the Sea of Galilee. The location is in the “Coasts of Caesarea Philippi,” near the head waters of the Jordan River, where the Savior conducted a secondary opinion poll among his disciples (Matthew 16:13-19). He asked them, “Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?” In their responses they informed him that “Some [say that thou art] John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.” After he had heard what others had said, He asked them a more pointed and personal question: “But whom say ye that I am?” You remember that it was the powerful Peter who responded, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” That was a bold and significant declaration for one of Jewish background to make since they as a people had been waiting for centuries for the coming of the Messiah—or the Christ. The Lord confirmed the validity of this declaration by assuring Peter that “flesh and blood hath not revealed [it] unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” and further, that “upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Some of you may be wondering what this has to do with AMCAP as an organization and the topic of “Using a Spiritual Model in Transporting Us Through Life’s Passages.” I submit that it has much to do with both. First, regarding this organization of counselors and psychotherapists who share common religious roots: I have watched this association for many years—earlier, on the playing field in its vestigial stages—and due to schedule conflicts in the past many years, I have been an interested card-carrying observer from the bleachers. I have appreciated the opportunity to serve, though, in a very limited way, as one of what are called the “AMCAP Fellows.”

Commendation is in order to all of you who have chosen your helping profession and have diligently strived to maintain all you do on the sure foundation of that “rock”—your testimony of the Savior, and of Restored Gospel truths and principles. You are a unique and influential group, accomplishing much good, and will continue to do so with the trust and confidence of those we sustain as living prophets, as long as you remain on that “rock.” I am confident that were the organization to take a turn away from these solid moorings of testimony and commitment to the Savior and the Restoration, the “gates of hell” may prevail and AMCAP would flounder and eventually disintegrate. Next, relative to my assigned topic of “Using a Spiritual Model in Transporting Us Through Life’s Passages,” I hope it will become obvious that having faith in Christ is the sure foundation on which we personally can successfully be transported through whatever transitions and passages we face in life.

In the invitation to share this time with you, I was asked by your leaders to focus on aging, retirement and the ultimate mortal transition of death and how the Spirit may be of assistance in making these transitions. They must have wanted to have a real live case study to present this topic and so here we are—both aging and retiring. As a consequence, much of what I say will be autobiographical.

Since August 15, we had begun the process of retiring—
things seemed to be going along well for a total of nine days when I received a call from President Hinckley and the conversation went something like this:

"Would you be willing to accept the call to go to San Diego and serve as Temple President and Matron – beginning September first?"

I responded, "Yes, we would be willing – did you say September first?"

"Yes. That’s in just a few days."

"President, we will be there," and that was the end of the conversation.

President Clifford Wallace’s wife, who was matron of the Temple, was very ill and President Hinckley obviously felt that their release should be sooner rather than later in order to permit President Wallace to spend those last days without the burden of Temple responsibilities on his shoulders. The timing of the call proved to be appropriate since Sister Wallace passed away about two weeks after we arrived.

Since the call, we have begun to make another kind of passage in our lives, and for the past month have felt like we have been drinking out of a fire hydrant, because there is so much to learn. Even though for years we have attended the temple with some regularity as patrons, we never had a glimmer of the multitude of organizational complexities that go on behind the scenes in the operation of a temple. They include the scheduling, calling and releasing of 2200 temple workers who in many cases are in their retirement years and making meaningful transitions in their own lives.

In 1997, the First Presidency and Twelve decided that the area authorities should be ordained seventies and function in their areas with most of the authority granted to general authorities. President Boyd K. Packer gave a speech assuring them that they were, in effect, full-fledged and authorized seventies. He made an adjustment in Gertrude Stein’s poem, “A rose is a rose is a rose” and used as his theme, “A Seventy is a Seventy is a Seventy.” Not long thereafter, one of the general authority seventies who had been granted emeritus status said, “A seventy is a seventy is a seventy – until he’s seventy.”

Well, that year has come in my life. For the past six years or so, I served in the Presidency of the Seventy. Then I was released from the Presidency as of August 15th, when all the changes were made in area and headquarters assignments for the seventies, and began to make that transition. In exactly twenty-four hours from now, in the afternoon session of General Conference, most likely a representative of the First Presidency will announce the ‘granting of emeritus status’, which will signal in effect my retirement from active service as a general authority, and another transition in our lives will begin. At that point, rather than being a member of the First Quorum of Seventy, I will return to our stake and ward and participate in the High Priest’s Group.

There will be no more assignments to stake and regional conferences where we are treated with such deference. Upon returning home from one stake conference assignment, Presiding Bishop Victor L. Brown’s wife said, “Well, who has been spoiling you this weekend?” There will be no more training responsibilities in various parts of the world with area, stake, mission and temple authorities: no more assignments to sit on the stand to preside at meetings—even in our home ward, by the way; no more direct and regular contact with the First Presidency and the Twelve and other colleagues among the General Authorities in meetings at Church Headquarters and in the upper room of the Temple, and so on.

Making these transitions requires a multitude of adjustments in thinking, feeling and schedule. The timing of these changes does not come as a surprise.

We have known for years that upon reaching seventy, a seventy does not continue to function as a seventy. It is, just as many of you who have served in ward and stake callings know, that in three, five, ten years or whatever, you will be released. Sooner or later, we all need to make that transition back to being a regular member of the ward with the ongoing responsibility of living under covenant rather than under call while someone else receives the opportunity to grow and develop in whatever position we have occupied. The reality is that with every call we receive there is a built-in release at some time in the future on this side of the veil. There are, however, a few exceptions. We were reminded of this when President Faust, at the conclusion of a stake conference, turned and said to the recently released stake president, “President, now that you are released, you’ll wake up in the morning and life will go on. With me, when I’m released, I’ll wake up in the morning and I’ll be dead!” There are a few exceptions – about fifteen of them, to be exact – who will not be released on this side of the veil. With all the rest of us, a future release date from whatever calling we have is built in. That is one of the reasons that while we are in whatever calling, we should serve just as it says we should in the scripture, “with all of our heart, might, mind and strength” (D&C 4:2).

How do we cope with changes such as releases, retirement, aging, and ultimately, the transition to the other side of the veil which come into our lives at expected or unexpected times? How can the Gospel, the Spirit and our system of values help us navigate through these transitions successfully? I
would like to share with you three practical suggestions that could be of assistance.

First, take a positive view and celebrate the transition. Let's begin with aging: If we live long enough, we are all sure to experience it and its effects. I notice in the audience a few of you who have dyed your hair the same color as mine. I'm reminded of a little tradition my wife Barbara and a friend have of exchanging birthday cards each year, all having something to do with how old each is becoming. The last one Barbara received had a picture on the front of a frumpy older lady dressed in dowdy clothes and the caption read, "When you get to be as old as you are, you need to remember one thing." Then turning to the inside cover it reads, "And if you do, you are way ahead of the rest."

Among a variety of adjustments in aging, the time does come when we experience changes in how the blood circulates to the brain. One friend told another, "You are getting old enough that you ought to start thinking about the hereafter." His response was, "I already am. When I go into a room, I think, 'What am I here for?'"

When release, age, and retirement come, take a positive view. Celebrate the change. In my case, I thought of the blessings that come with the gift of time:

- time to do so many things I had not found nor taken the time to do while in active service. Even if the Bishop of our ward didn't feel inspired to call me to any position, there would still be more for me to do than could be done in the time available. I knew I could find life meaningful—living under covenant rather than under call. There were so many things that came to my mind that could and should be done. Fortunately, a variety of them are of value even beyond this life. Here is a portion of my list:
  - Family History— I'm still hoping and praying that I will not have to appear before the judgment bar of the Lord without having done more than I have done to date.
  - Personal history— going through and putting together files, photographs and writing— for behold, "there is much unorganized."
  - Vegetable and flower gardening— have you heard of the "Garden of weedin"?
  - Art— watercolor and oil painting— I have always wanted to learn more about painting. It reminds me of an older brother I was talking to the other day who after retirement had taken an art class. His teacher asked if he would like to have the painting he had been working on put on display with others of his students. He responded, "No, I have sold it." "You have already sold your painting?" the teacher asked. "Yes, I sold it to my wife for fifty dollars, with the guarantee that I would not be hanging it in our home."
  - Our little dry farm in Banida, Idaho needs a lot more help than I have found time to give in the last few years.
  - Writing— not an attempt at something necessarily of general consumption but especially what I hope would be of some value to our children and grandchildren.
  - Travel to some of those places we have wanted to visit but have not had the opportunity to this point.
  - Taking advantage of the time to read and really study in depth so much of what I have not found or taken time to do. There are so many books I have yet to read.
  - Having time to do something with a few of those carpenter's tools in the "Tuff" shed in back of the house. I have a grandson who asked me if we could go out and build something. I said, "What would you like to build?" He said, "It doesn't matter— just if we can do it together."
  - Golf and other physical activities. I enjoy golf and I have overcome all those problems in the game except two: distance and direction. I could also do a lot more walking with my wife, Barbara. I've heard that walking is the universally best exercise and while doing so, we are able to solve most of the problems of the world.
  - Grandchildren hikes take some time and effort but I don't know of many things where I feel both my time and effort are used to more advantage.
  - Helping others— neighbors and family. There are all kinds of help I could give to our children and grandchildren— and that ranges all the way from building and flying a kite, making a slingshot, or helping lay sod in one of the yards.
  - Temple attendance and service. We likely underestimate the great value this service is not only to those on the other side of the veil but also to those of us who have arrived at the age when we need to find something more meaningful to do with our lives than merely lowering our golf score.
  - Volunteer service is another option. How about that soup kitchen or helping with a multitude of projects in the inner city, or wherever?
  - Chores around the house. I have a long list of chores that should be done around the house and the yard, such as repairing or replacing that leaning fence, helping to see that the sprinkler system covers more effectively, etc. My list is only exceeded in length by the one that Barbara has for me to do.
The piano and guitar. I love music and enjoy entertaining myself on either the piano or the guitar, but really, I should learn to play more than the two or three missionary hymns and the few chords I learned to play on the guitar a half century ago.

- Firesides with children and grandchildren. With our six children and twenty-eight grandchildren, we could and should have more scheduled couples and grandchildren firesides, reunions, etc. These activities have provided us with some of our most meaningful discussions and opportunities for positive parenting and grand-parenting input.
- Church service. After all of this, there may still be something the Bishop would like us to do in the ward as a home teacher or whatever but if that were not to come, as you can see from this list or the one you would develop for yourself, one does not need a formal calling or regular nine-to-five job to keep genuinely occupied with meaningful things to do after retirement. We should remember that it is of even more importance to live under covenant than it is to live under call. With a wide range of interests and participation, the Spirit can help make almost any passage successful to a new stage in our life.

**Second, write the "Things of My Soul" (see 2 Nephi 4:15).** At times of major transitions in our lives, there is value in thinking and writing about what some have come to call "The Things of My Soul" - the things that really matter most in our life. Recently, I was assigned to do what has become a tradition among the seventies at the time of release. We have the assignment to speak to the other seventies on the subject of "The Things of My Soul." It caused me many hours of deep reflection on what matters most to me. I was grateful that as a result of the restoration of the Gospel, we have a remarkably helpful system of meaningful values. Unfortunately, many in our society do not have a system of values that strengthens them. During the years of the "Hippie" sub-culture, I remember reading a sobering comment from an author who wrote about two young men as follows:

He was a senior, an outstanding student and leader in one of America's best schools. He had much to be proud of, but his words were somber, "This is a world of madness, absurd, stupid, nothing solid. There are no values to depend upon."

About the other, the author wrote:

"At Andover, a seventeen-year old, tie askew, plaid jacket wrinkled from never being hung up, looked across the campus where elms towered above gray stone buildings. He spoke hesitantly, "I have no values because there is no basis for them. I haven't any goals because I don't know what to aim for." (Cumminskey, 1962)

Unfortunately, that situation hasn't changed much in the last thirty years; there are many who feel similarly today.

Abraham Maslow (1959) wrote that "our prime disease is valuelessness. It is a state variously described as amorality, restlessness, emptiness, alienation, hopelessness, the lack, in short, of something to believe in and be devoted to." Things have not changed much for many around us today. Maslow went on to say: "We need a validated, usable system of human values that we can believe in and devote ourselves to, because they are true rather than because we are exhorted to believe and have faith." (Maslow, 1960, p. 3).

That is exactly what we have in the Gospel – a "validated, usable system of human values that we can believe in and devote ourselves to because they are true rather than because we are exhorted to believe and have faith." Having this system of values makes sorting out what is most meaningful to us much easier.

Many years ago, I experienced what in one way was a personal revelation that changed my life and helped me to appreciate what really matters to me. Sharing it with you may be of some value. Some motivation for doing what I did may have come from the lines in the hymn we all know so well:

When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed
When you are discouraged thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings
Name them one by one
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.
(Hymn #241)

I did that. I sat down and wrote on a sheet of paper a list of the blessings in my life that I thought were important to me. I wrote them in whatever order they came to my mind. Then I sorted them out by priority. Which one was the most precious, next most, and so on down the list. One of the impressive things to me about the experience was to read my list and note that at the top were several blessings that are so important to me that I would pray for the courage to give up my mortal life to defend them. Blessings at the top of my list were my faith, family and freedom.

I had difficulty in deciding how to order the blessings of my faith and my family, which should be first and which should be second. I finally decided to consider them a tie for first place because in the Gospel they are so closely linked together. On further consideration, however, I imagined a situation in which my wife, Barbara, were to say to me something like, "Joe, I've had
It is either your testimony of God, the Savior, the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon and the Restoration of the Gospel — or me. If you will deny all that, I will stay with you. If you will not, I’m gone. What will it be? It was then I knew that I could not deny my testimony even if it meant losing the precious blessings my wife brings into my life. I am confident that if Barbara were given a similar choice, her testimony is firm enough that she would decide the same. I would be the one gone in order to preserve her testimony. That is one of the reasons Barbara is so precious to me. We share a common conviction.

We know where each is coming from in the area of commitment and we know that it is through the restored keys of the sealing power of the priesthood that the love we share as sweethearts for each other and as parents for our children is meant by the Lord to last forever. We place that faith and testimony first on our list and then, our family comes next.

When I think of family, I also include the profound influence for good my parents had on my life. I find myself thinking more and more often about what a blessing they were. I was their oldest son. My sister, Coy, was the oldest child. Mom and Dad hadn’t had any experience in naming sons and so when it came to naming me after my father, whose name was Joseph, in their practical and down-to-earth way they determined that since everyone would likely call me “Joe” anyway, that is all they gave me and I became “Joe Junior.” A few years ago, when a friend found out that my name was Joe and not Joseph said, “Out of deference to the Prophet, you ought to change your name to Joseph.”

I responded, “Well, out of deference to my parents, I will leave it as they gave it to me.”

But somehow for me, as I was growing up, my parents seemed to know just what to do. On the farm, especially during World War II when finding available hired help was not easy, we learned to work with the cows, the irrigation turns, and on tractors in the field at an early age. There were many five-to-nine days rather than nine-to-five days. Even though there were times — while hauling hay on hot summer afternoons, or the early and late work with the milking chores — when we wished we could have the life of our city friends. As I think back on it now, I will always be grateful for learning the lessons which came from that work in those early years. We have tried to pass that benefit along to our children and hope for it in the lives of our grandchildren. My parents were always kind, gentle and deeply committed to the Gospel.

Neither my father nor mother ever physically punished me. They never laid a hand on me in anger and yet somehow they were able to cause me to feel that I never wanted to do anything that would embarrass or disappoint them. Even though I am sure there were occasions when I did both, they always made me feel supported and loved. For nine years, Dad was Bishop of our little ward in Banida, Idaho, and rather than rebelling as the Bishop’s son, I felt an obligation to do what I could to be supportive of him and encouraged my friends to do the same.

One day I had a conversation with Dad about some acquaintances who had rebelled against their father’s domineering and autocratic rules in their family, where there were unreasonable groundings, and sometimes even harsh physical punishments. After thinking about the situation for a few moments, Dad said, “Well son, I’ve always thought that if parents don’t make many rules beyond what the Gospel teaches, the children won’t break many rules and won’t need to be punished.” My folks always made me feel that I was respected. They always made me feel that I was better than I am. More and more I appreciate them for that and those feelings have become some of the important “things of my soul.”

My mother’s influence on me has been profound. She was the most cheerful, optimistic and Christian person I had ever known. She had a love for life — all kinds of life — that had a powerful effect in my own. To illustrate, I remember a friend and I had been in the hills north of Banida with our .22 rifles hunting jackrabbits. We came across a rattlesnake and had shot and killed it. We brought the rattles home as a trophy. That night at the supper table I shared with some pride the experience of our conquest. I will never forget the gist of my mother’s response. She said, “Sonny, don’t you think that rattlesnake enjoyed living? There are hundreds of rattlesnakes on that mountain and killing one of them won’t make any difference.” All of a sudden my heroism didn’t seem so heroic after all. Likely that is one reason I came to a stage in my life when it is difficult for me to take the life of almost anything (I probably should confess that to this point, flies and mosquitoes haven’t risen to that level of concern).

Even though I must confess I am not anxious to move on to the other side of the veil, I still look forward to the day when I will have another opportunity to sit down and have a good visit with Dad and Mom. I will want to verbally thank them again for contributing so much to what I feel are my most precious blessings — those blessings that money cannot buy, because they are without price, and consequently, are priceless. Just by counting your own blessings and putting them in order of priority will help you “lift up your heart and rejoice.” The strength and spirit that come from doing so can help us make life’s transitions more successfully.
After faith and family, on my list of my most precious blessings, comes freedom. How I appreciate living in a land where our basic freedoms and inalienable rights are protected! I’m so grateful for the Constitution and the Bill of Rights that strive to preserve life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. I had that blessing of freedom and its importance to me tested in 1953. It was during the time of the Korean “Police Action” that seemed more like a war to us since 25,000 American servicemen’s lives had been lost, including that of one of my cousins who was very near my age. It was a time of what they called “Universal Military Training.” In other words all the young men who were physically and mentally able were required to fulfill their military duty. I was involved in training to become an officer in the Air Force. At about the same time I received the anticipated orders to active duty, Barbara and I had just found out that our first child was expected. I was to report to Sewart Air Force Base in Tennessee to be processed into active service on July 29, 1953. It was a time of bitter fighting in North Korea. I fully thought that within six months after entering active duty, I could likely receive orders to go to Korea as several of my friends and relatives had done. It was a time of serious thought for me. I weighed my values at the deepest level. I did not like the idea of leaving Barbara and the son or daughter we were expecting (back in those days, times were more unsophisticated so we never knew whether it was to be a boy or a girl; all we hoped and prayed for was that it would be a “healthy little Mormon”). The prospect of leaving home, family, country and going into the unknown where lives were daily being lost was not of casual concern. The Cold War was at a heated peak. Russian communism was firmly entrenched. The threat of the North Korean communists with the backing of the billions of red mainland Chinese dominating northern Asia then, and in domino fashion, the conquest of all of southeast Asia seemed very real to me. The expressed goals of the communists were international revolution, the destruction of democracy, religion and finally worldwide domination. This could be the loss of freedom and those basic inalienable rights for all of us. In the process of weighing all of this, I sincerely came to feel that I was willing to do my part to help defend those values I considered so important. I decided that I would willingly go and serve to the best of my ability wherever the military was to send me. As it turned out, while Barbara and I were en route to that first active duty assignment, a cease-fire agreement was signed at Panmunjon. And so, I don’t have any war stories to tell anyone. I served at the Charleston Air Force Base in South Carolina and we had a marvelous growth experience in the Church and the military. Today, thinking of the things of my soul and those blessings that are most precious to me, if the same threat to our freedoms, families and country were to present themselves again, I would willingly sign up and do all I could to help defend them.

I believe that standing up for freedom is what we all did in the confrontation we had in our pre-mortal lives before coming to this earth. We chose to defend freedom, the possibility of eternal progression, and the prospect of our families becoming eternally linked in a mortal setting – a setting in which we would be tested to see what our decisions would be when given full opportunity for choice between good and evil.

It seems to me that in the Church we occasionally have some semantic problems distinguishing between freedom and agency. Sometimes we hear that in the pre-mortal war in heaven, Lucifer was attempting to “take away our agency.” In my opinion, Satan’s plan was not to take away our agency but rather the freedom of exercising our agency. I recognize that we do not have all the information we undoubtedly will receive some day in the future on this significant subject, but until further enlightened, I choose to think that agency is a gift rather than a gift – and that agency is an essential component of the individual’s intelligence that is a component of each of us. We read that intelligence “was not created or made, neither indeed can be” (D&C 93:29), because it has always existed and, I believe, literally cannot be destroyed (D&C 93). For me intelligence and agency are two of those marvelous eternals that set our LDS faith uniquely and powerfully apart from the sectarian religions of the world. All of this relates to my feeling that freedom and its defense must be high on my list of values and “things of my soul.”

Third, and finally, remember the “Plan.” The existentialist philosopher, Soren Kirkegaard, referred to what he called “that awesome chasm of death” (Kirkegaard, 1993). That awesome chasm is what death is for anyone who does not have the blessings of knowing and believing what has come to be called the “Plan of Redemption” (Alma 22:33), the “Plan of Salvation” (Moses 6:62), or the “Great Plan of Happiness” (Alma 42:8). The Spirit can be of great assistance to us when facing that ultimate mortal passage from this life, when death is imminent, by remembering “the Plan.”

Just a few months ago, I was reminded of the mortal finality of death in a very vivid way. My sister, Coy, just older than I, had cared for years for my brother-in-law, John, who was stricken years ago with slowly deteriorating Multiple Sclerosis. His difficulties had progressed to the point that around-the-clock care was needed. Coy was the care giver. Then one day, noting that she was not feeling well, Coy went
to the doctor for a check up. Problems were discovered. She was immediately and directly hospitalized and from that point never was able to return to their home. An inoperable, metastasized, stomach and liver cancer was discovered and two months later she was at death's door. It pains me even to talk about it because, as brother and sister, we had been very close. At her request, I came to the hospital for a personal and private visit. The concern for her husband, John, and his care were uppermost on her mind. She was grateful that an adequate center had been located which could provide the around-the-clock care he needed. Her children and grandchildren were mentioned with deep feeling. Then, she described her condition and the doctors' grim prognosis indicating that there was nothing to be done except increasing the pain medication in an effort to keep her as comfortable as possible. She discussed dying and the very difficult question of whether or not removing artificial life support would be acceptable to the Lord and a right thing to do under the circumstances. I assured her that the decision, as difficult as it was, would have to be hers, but knowing that all had been done medically as well as through our combined faith, prayers, and Priesthood blessings, dying naturally would not seem to me to be contrary to Divine will. She made her decision, said good-bye to all her loved ones and then taught all of us a great deal about dying with dignity. Then, she was gone.

In one of her last conversations with her Latter-day Saint doctor, she said that she would like to be buried with a current temple recommend. He said, "I don't think they use them over there." She said, "I want to be buried with my current temple recommend anyway." The Bishop and Stake President came for the interviews and she was buried with her current temple recommend, just as she wished. The "Plan," the "Rock," the Spirit – and their significance – were uppermost in her mind as she made that final mortal passage to the other side of the veil.

In summary, if we want to have the blessings of the Spirit in making successfully the various passages in our life that result from aging, retiring – and finally, dying – we will be helped if we remember to:

- Think positively and celebrate retirement or release. It is more important to live under covenant than it is to live under call.
- Think of and write the things that matter most to you – "The Things of My Soul."
- Remember the "Plan" that lets us know who we are, our purpose in life and what we can look forward to in the life to come.

If we do all this, the Spirit will be with us. Our testimony of the Savior and what He has done for us will be increased and we will remain on that "Rock" – firm and immovable regardless of the difficult passages we have to go through in our mortal lives. I am eternally grateful that in the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ we have that "validated, usable system of human values that we can believe in and devote ourselves to, because they are true rather than [merely] because we are exhorted to believe and have faith." With you I testify that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God and upon this "Rock" we can successfully build. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen

Elder Joe J. Christensen has been a member of the First Quorum of Seventy since 1989, and currently serves as president of the San Diego Temple. He graduated (PhD) from Washington State University, and has served as Associate Commissioner of Church Education, as president of the Mission Training Center, and as president of Ricks College. Elder Christensen holds an honored place in AMCAP: he was one of its original Founders, served as a member of the 1976 Committee that formulated AMCAP's Bylaws, and served a 3-year term (1978-1981) on the Governing Board. He also served twice as chairman of AMCAP's predecessor organization, the LDSPGA. Elder Christensen's last assignment before attaining Emeritus status as a General Authority was to present this address to AMCAP at the 1999 Fall Convention.

References