



Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel

Volume 3 | Number 3

Article 19

9-2-2002

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BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Rogers, Eric P. "What a Wonderful Journey!" An Interview with Stanley A. Peterson." *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 3, no. 3 (2002). <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/re/vol3/iss3/19>

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Photograph of Stanley A. Peterson, ca. 1974

Courtesy of Stanley A. Peterson

“What a Wonderful Journey!” An Interview with Stanley A. Peterson

Eric Paul Rogers

Eric Paul Rogers is supervisor of strategic planning for the Church Educational System.

During his twenty-four-year tenure as administrator of religious education and elementary and secondary education, Stanley A. Peterson guided the Church Educational System (CES) through a period of remarkable growth. In 1977, when Brother Peterson assumed leadership, seminary and institute enrollments worldwide totaled 301,439. As Brother Peterson delivered his farewell address at the August 2001 CES Religious Educators Conference, seminary and institute enrollments had more than doubled to 722,844.¹ I visited with Stan in June 2002 in his home in Orem, Utah, and asked him questions about his retirement, his career with CES, and his successor, Paul V. Johnson.

How has your life changed since you retired?

I guess I would begin the interview with a story that I thought at the time was so delightful, and now I can relate to it. It was probably a few months after Ernest Wilkinson was released as president of BYU. Ernest Wilkinson hired me to come to BYU, and I knew him quite well. After he had been released as president, he was writing a history of BYU and was on campus. One day I went to the Skyroom to have lunch, and he was there sitting all alone at a table. I walked over to him and said, “Hello, President. How is everything?” He looked at me and in kind of a curt way, which was his manner, he said, “I don’t know how everything is; I’m not in charge of everything anymore!” It’s been an interesting ten months [for me] because you are in charge of everything and then all of a sudden you’re in charge of nothing.

I told Paul Johnson when I left, “Paul, you are now the man, and I’m not going to mother you. I’m not going to come hang around. I’m not going to bother you. I’m going to go away. It isn’t because I’m hurt or I’m angry or I’m pouting. It’s because you need to be in charge. If you want to call me at any time, I’d be happy to talk to you. I’d be happy to answer questions, but I’m not going to call you. So just know that if you don’t see me, it’s not because I don’t love you; it’s because you need to now take charge.”

When the Evening with a General Authority came along, he called and asked, “Would you and Anna sit on the stand?” I replied, “Paul, that’s your first really official faculty meeting, and I’m not going to come and be in the limelight at all. You need to establish yourself.” In the ten months I’ve been out, I have not gone back to the office once. I’ve been in the Church Office Building for meetings that the Brethren asked me to come to, but I’ve never gone back to the ninth floor. Like I said, it isn’t because I’m angry or anything. It’s just that that’s what it needs to be. I think you need to be as gracious in exiting an assignment as in entering. And so I’m trying to be gracious and stay out and let Paul establish himself as the leader.

How is your health?

My health is fair. I wish it were better. What I’m learning is I have limitations that aren’t going to change. My stamina is very poor. I have certain health problems that are not going to go away. I feel better now because I have gotten more rest. The pressure is off, and so I’m feeling better than I did. The last three years were really tough because my health wasn’t good. I didn’t feel like I could let down, and yet my body was telling me, “You have to slow down, and you have to get more rest.” I’m also very cognizant of the limitations that I have on me, that I don’t have the energy. I don’t have the stamina to do nearly what I was doing. The Lord sustained me, and the faith and prayers of my CES family and the Brethren kept me going much longer than I probably would have been able to, but I’m very limited in how much I can do. I can go for a couple or three hours in a day, and then I’m shot. That’s just not what I was doing before.

But Anna and I love being together. We walk every morning about forty-five or fifty minutes, and I sleep a lot. I rest a lot. That’s as good for me as anything. I’m feeling fairly well. I’m probably as good as I’m going to get. We’re doing quite a few things that we’ve wanted to do for a long time. I said, “I’m going to do them while I can and

while you can, Anna." So we're doing some things we want to do because it's going to end, and then we'll have to be more humble.

It's been a wonderful ten months. People have asked me, "Do you miss your work?" and I say, "No, I don't, honestly, but I miss the people." It's a wonderful association I've had over these years. The CES family is so dear and near; they're still in our prayers every single day. We pray for all of you, and we feel so close to you. You would be surprised how many phone calls and visits I receive. One day John Beck and Garry Moore came to see me. While they were here, Nelson Dibble came to see me. While Nelson was here, somebody else came to see me. There were four CES folks here within a matter of fifteen or twenty minutes. It's been a sweet experience. I've absented myself from the middle of things, but I certainly haven't lost my love and appreciation for CES and the family that I feel so much a part of. I just love my brothers and sisters in CES, and that will never change.

What were the events that led up to your coming into CES?

Well, originally I was at the University of Southern California. While I was at USC, Ernest Wilkinson asked me to come to BYU. I was the department chairman for two years, then associate dean for one year, and then the dean of continuing education for six years. Jeff Holland and I were deans together at BYU. When Jeff Holland became commissioner of education for the Church, he had a dream of bringing religious education, Church schools, and continuing education together under one umbrella. Joe Christensen was over religious education. Ken Beasley was over the Church schools, and I was over continuing education. Jeff also brought in Henry B. Eyring, who was president of Ricks College. Henry Eyring came in as deputy commissioner. Joe and I were associate commissioners.

The three of us were given the assignment to take Church schools, religious education, and continuing education and bring them together. When Ken Beasley was over schools, he had his men going out visiting the schools in South America and the South Pacific and so forth. Joe had his people going out and doing their visiting and administration. And we did continuing education programs. We had literacy in South America and Know Your Religion, Education Week, and that kind of thing. Jeff Holland felt we should bring everything under one umbrella. One administrator could take a geographical area and worry about everything that went on in that area. We wouldn't have to have separate administrations for each function. It worked pretty well, but we

found as we went forward that having three heads was just not working really well; it was not as smooth as it could have been.

Then Joe Christensen was called to be the president of the MTC, and Henry Eyring was called to replace Jeff Holland as commissioner. Elder Eyring and I conferred, and we just felt like it was best to have one head. I became the head of all of those functions: religious education, elementary and secondary schools, and the continuing education programs that are not strictly BYU. The Education Week, Know Your Religion, and Especially For Youth programs fall under the CES banner. Jeff's feeling was that when I came up there, we could kind of pool continuing education and that together, but it didn't quite work out the way we all thought it might. That is how it started and how it evolved into my role as administrator over the whole thing. When I took over the administration, it was the first time everything was under one head. It worked well. I was in the central office twenty-four years and saw a lot of wonderful things come to pass over those years.

One of the humorous things that would always cause me to smile was my title. Wherever I went, people didn't know how to introduce me because my title was administrator of religious education, elementary and secondary education for the Church Educational System of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—nobody knew what to call me! I really had the biggest handle as far as a title that I have ever seen, so I just shortened it. When people asked, "What do you do?" I didn't want to give them the whole title so I just explained, "I'm over religious education and schools." The only problem was that could be misunderstood because then some would think I'm over BYU and Ricks College. I never solved that one.

What were your most memorable experiences, and what did you learn from them?

I traveled over four million miles in 150 countries and met marvelous, marvelous people. The thing I enjoyed the most was getting acquainted with folks, being in their homes all over the world. I've been in CES homes everywhere. One of the experiences that typifies the feelings I have for our CES family occurred in Montevideo, Uruguay. I was there visiting as I did a lot. In fact, there was a period of time when I was gone from 175 to 200 days a year. Because there was so much going on and so many things that I needed to be doing, I was gone a lot.

As the years went on and I reorganized and put the zone administrators in the role that they are in, I did less of the traveling and they

did more of it. But I was in Montevideo, Uruguay, and one of our CES men, a stake president in Montevideo, invited me to come to his home for dinner one evening. It was in a little apartment building. I went into their home and ate with them. There was one chair, and they gave it to me. The others were on boxes around the table. I sat in the honored seat. I don't think there was one plate on the table like any other—nothing matched. The silverware didn't match. We had a very humble meal. It was Monday night, and they invited me to be with them for family home evening. As I was alone in the living room waiting for them to begin—they were in the other room getting everything put together—I just reached out and touched the walls on both sides of the room. That was their living room; I could touch the walls on both sides. It was about six feet wide and eight feet long. They had a kitchen, that room, and three very small bedrooms. As I sat with that little family and watched them conduct their family home evening and felt of their spirit, I was so moved. I thought, *It doesn't matter where you go or how humble the circumstances: where the faithful gather, the Spirit of the Lord is there.* There was such a sweet spirit in that little home as we sang songs to a little guitar and did the things you do in a family home evening. That experience typifies my travels around the world: being in the homes of humble, sweet people and knowing that the Spirit of the Lord dwells with the pure in heart.

I just learned to love people everywhere. Their intent was pure, and their purposes were focused on moving the Church forward, moving the work of the Lord forward, helping make Church education do what it is supposed to do. You know, that's the thing that touches me every time I talk about it—the dedication and the spirit of those in our CES program who gave their all, who *give* their all every day to make the work move forward. I was so impressed with the teachers—the early-morning teachers all over the world—in some of the most interesting and humble circumstances, in little homes, in chapels, in halls, in every kind of a setting you can imagine. I remember one morning in England going to a little hall. It was a church, but it was a rented facility. It was a very, very humble little place. It was cold, it was foggy, it was miserable weather, and the building was no warmer than it was outside. Because the kids needed to get to early-morning seminary, the ward had taken up a project and had acquired bicycles for all the kids so they could get to seminary. They came and gathered and brought their bikes inside and sat in this little room. It was cold, and yet that teacher had those kids mesmerized. A marvelous lesson was given; the

Spirit of the Lord was there; and they learned. All these experiences cause you to come out saying, "The gospel is true! Hallelujah, I'm a part of it!"

You were an early-morning seminary teacher, weren't you?

That's really how I started my career—five years as an early-morning seminary teacher in California. I did it while I was a bishop. We had a large ward with 250 young people between the ages of twelve and twenty-one. When I started as a young bishop in my mid-twenties, there were 960 in my ward. LeGrand Richards called me as bishop. We had trouble finding seminary teachers who would get up early in the morning. One class of about thirty juniors and seniors were on their third teacher by Christmas. When the Christmas vacation came—in those days we gave report cards at Christmas break—our seminary teacher gave the report cards to these thirty seminary kids and flunked every single one of them—all thirty of them. The teacher gave them all F's and then resigned. I said, "Our kids aren't that bad. I'll teach them myself." I told the seminary supervisor, "I want to teach them." He said, "All right," and I started teaching. I taught for five years and loved every minute of it.

Actually, I was a bishop twice in that area. I was bishop of two wards. Finally, I got to the point where I was so bone tired because the ward went from 960 to 1,140 before they split it. I was going to graduate school; I was teaching seminary; I was a bishop; and I then became a school principal. I even had a family, and once in a while I got to see them. After five years, I finally quit. I said, "I can't teach anymore in seminary." They said, "Will you teach our Sunday School class?" I replied, "Okay, I'll do that." I loved those kids so much I did something very unorthodox. I didn't want to let them go, so I called myself as their Sunday School teacher and taught them for about eight months.

Are there people from those early years with whom you have maintained contact?

I have kept in contact with many of the young people. I still see them. On occasion, they stop in to see me. They came to see me at the office. I saw many of them marry in the temple and serve missions. Stan Johnson, whom many may know, was in my ward when I was bishop. Jerry Lund and Bruce Lake were in my ward. Paul Hanks,

Clarence Schramm, and Garry Moore were in my stake.

You may have heard me talk of Miguel Cervantes down in Arequipa, Peru. He's a young man whom I met when I was speaking in Arequipa at a fireside. The little guy was seventeen years old. He came into the chapel with two little sticks that he used as crutches because he was paralyzed from the waist down. He hobbled into the chapel on those two little homemade crutches. I watched him come in, and my heart went out to him. After the program, I held meetings with the seminary teachers. We had a long get-together of about an hour and a half. Then we left for my hotel.

Several kilometers from the chapel, in the lights of the truck, I saw that little boy walking down the street with his two little sticks. I said to the man driving, "Stop, I want to see that young man. He was at our fireside." We had come a long way from the chapel, and he was still working his way down that road a good hour and a half after the fireside. We stopped and I said, "Weren't you at the fireside at the Mormon Church?" He said, "Yes, I was." I explained, "I'm Brother Peterson. I'm the one who spoke. I want to talk to you. Can we give you a ride home?" He said, "Oh, I'm just going down here to catch a bus. I'll be okay." I said, "No, we want to take you home."

I picked him up and lifted him into the truck and took his little sticks and threw them into the back of the pickup. The little guy was soaking wet with sweat from working his way down there; it was just pouring off him. I got acquainted with him. I asked him if he went to seminary. He said, "I'm the president of my class this year."

I said, "It's the Book of Mormon this year. Have you read the Book of Mormon?"

"I've read it five times!" he explained.

I got acquainted with him, and he is now thirty-two years old. I've written to him for fifteen years. I just got a letter from him. It is on my desk. He has struggled because of several surgeries. He was trying to go to school. He wanted to go on a mission. In that letter was a copy of his temple recommend, and he wrote, "I want you to know I'm worthy to go to the temple, and I have gone to the temple, and here is a copy of my recommend." After fifteen years, he had gotten to the temple. All that time he had been struggling and working. He said, "I couldn't go on a mission, but I'm teaching the gospel to all of my friends and hoping that they will understand what a wonderful thing it can be in their lives."



What are some of the most important changes you have seen in CES?

There are several. The rolling out of the program worldwide was the most exciting. People who had never been involved in the program were suddenly teaching seminary, and it was going as well as it does here. They caught the vision. My role in the central office started in 1977. We were just really starting to see a thrust into international areas. When Elder Packer and Elder Tuttle were the assistants to William E. Berrett, the program consisted of five of the western states and Cardston, Canada. That was CES, really. When you look at what it has become, where it is now, the thrill for me and the excitement were that I got to be a part of that worldwide expansion.

I will always remember something William E. Berrett said to me one night as Anna and I took him to the Christmas dinner for the CES folks in Utah Valley at BYU. It was held in the Wilkinson Center. It was just for the Utah Valley group. He said, "You know, Stan, there are more people here in this little group than there were in the whole program when I was the administrator. This is amazing to me to see what has happened to the program since I was in charge." When you start thinking of about forty-five thousand teachers, volunteers, and full-time people worldwide teaching hundreds of thousands of young people, what an impact that can have and is having!

Photos

All photos courtesy of Stanley A. Peterson except photo 6, which is courtesy of Eric Paul Rogers.

1. Presenting an award to President Hinckley and the Church on behalf of the United Way, 1985.
2. Visiting with Church schools students in Tonga, ca. 1983.
3. Meeting with CES administrators and students in an adobe chapel in Ascunción, Paraguay, ca. 1984.
4. Training CES administrators in 1977. Also pictured: Henry B. Eyring, Deputy Commissioner of Education, and Joe J. Christensen, Associate Commissioner of Education.
5. CES area convention, Baraloché, Argentina, 1984.
6. Eric Paul Rogers interviewing Stanley A. Peterson, June 21, 2002.
7. Stan and Anna Peterson at a CES conference in Singapore, ca. 1995.
8. Introducing Elder Neal A. Maxwell at a CES symposium address in the deJong Concert Hall, BYU, ca. 1983.
9. The Peterson family in 1975, children from left to right: Lisa, Wendy, Julie, Mark, Lori, Brian.

I felt, a long time ago, that the most critical thing we needed to do was outstanding inservice training. We devoted a lot of time, energy, and money to inservice training. I know the Brethren have questioned on occasion spending that much on inservice training. I have said to the Brethren on numerous occasions, "It's the best money we spend, because you have got to train these people and help them catch the vision so they can pass it on to the kids." It isn't just saying, "The Lord bless you; go to work!"

The thing that is exciting to me, though, is not only does it bless the young people in that seminary classroom but it blesses the whole Church. As these teachers learn how to teach and work effectively with young people, they become bishops and they become Relief Society presidents and they become all kinds of things in the Church and bless the Church in so many ways. Many of the Brethren have told me, "Oh, the training your people get blesses every aspect of the Church because your people use what they have learned from you in their callings." That has been a wonderful thing to see.

When I taught early-morning seminary, the volume of materials that we had was overwhelming. I have said on a number of occasions that I could have taught the whole year and never opened the scriptures. Then President Kimball gave the challenge to us in about 1977 or 1978 to reduce and simplify. We could not continue with that volume of material. I'm sure he was envisioning the growth of the Church. Putting the materials in all these languages just wasn't possible. He gave us the challenge to reduce and simplify, and we started working on that.

I called Jay Jensen and Jerry Lund and David Christensen into my office, and I said, "We have got to make changes. We have got to reduce and simplify and make this curriculum exportable worldwide so it can be used in the humble little home-study classroom as well as in the released-time program, and the focus must be on the scriptures. I am going to give you the challenge to go and put together a plan, and I don't want to see your faces until you have one." They went away for a few days and came back with a plan. We started on that plan and worked on it for many, many years. In fact, it has just come to fruition in the last couple of years. The curriculum today is about 10 percent the volume of what it was in 1977. When you realize that we are in 147 countries now, you know why we had to simplify and reduce and focus on the scriptures. That is probably as satisfying an experience for me as anything. No matter where I went, I walked into classrooms

where the young people had their scriptures on their desk. Every time I saw that, it reignited the excitement in me that it is working—we are getting the kids into the scriptures.

As you reflect over the past twenty-four years, is there anything you wish you had done differently?

No, I don't think so. I certainly made a lot of mistakes. I would not want you to think that I didn't make mistakes. But I don't look back with regrets. I probably could have delegated more than I did. I probably was a little too much of a hands-on administrator, but I had goals in mind of what I wanted to do and how I wanted to do it, and I did it. I was that kind of an administrator. I don't regret it. I think to a certain degree, because I was that much of a hands-on administrator and did so much myself, it probably broke my health. I think that's one of the reasons I had to retire early. I pushed myself. I would average at least a fourteen-hour day. Most weeks it was seven days a week—I would speak on Sundays. I remember one three-month period, a March, April, and a May, when we were doing a lot of in-service and a lot of graduations in which I delivered 154 talks. Talks aren't what I was supposed to do! I was doing the other stuff in the administration, but I wanted to do everything I could to help move the work. I literally gave everything I had. If I had saved myself a little more and not been so free to take everything that anybody asked me to do, I would have been healthier and may have been able to administer longer. Looking back at my career, the most satisfying thing I can say is that I don't have any regrets. I don't say, "I wish I had . . ." or "I wish I could have. . . ." I feel a real peace in my soul, a real satisfaction. I don't want to boast. I don't want people to think I did everything perfectly. I certainly did not. But I feel good about what I did. I had a wonderful journey.

I loved what I did. I think we made a lot of progress. When I walked away, having finished my role, I felt like I left the organization in good condition. I left good leadership, good people who have been trained. I had appointed every single person who held any administrative assignment in any aspect of our program because I had been there so long. I had appointed all the area directors, all the zone administrators, all of the country directors. And I said to myself, "Boy, it's time for change. We need to get new blood." I felt like the organization that I left was strong. It was moving forward, and good things were happening. I'm sure there are a lot of things we could have done differently and more effectively, but I feel good about what happened.

You have talked about some of the sacrifices you made to come into CES. Teaching for CES has traditionally been viewed as an occupation requiring sacrifice. Is it the same today as it used to be?

I took a 75 percent cut in salary when I came to work for the Church. I said to my wife, "We're not going to look back, and we're not going to say, 'What if?' We're just going to go forward and have faith that the Lord wants us here, and we are going to do what we need to do." I can honestly tell you that it was no sacrifice because the Lord has blessed us in so many ways.

We have made a lot of progress in what we are able to pay our seminary and institute teachers and our administrators. I have said on several occasions in the last few years, "I don't apologize for what we pay anymore." We have made enough progress that we can hold our heads high. Our teachers are fairly paid. We know sacrifices are made. I know that there are a lot of our people who make tremendous sacrifices—move out of new homes to go to a new area.

I know of one family who had just completely remodeled their home and bought new furniture. We asked them to move, and they did not even hesitate. They just went. I went to see them after I retired. I felt so much gratitude to that couple for what they were willing to do. They had bought all this new furniture. They just sold it because it wouldn't fit in their house. The house they got was about one-fourth the size of the house they had previously. I told them, "I'm coming to see you. I just want to come and tell you we love you and we appreciate the sacrifices you have made." I went to their home. They are doing a marvelous job in their new assignment, but the little house they are in is so small. They have two little bedrooms upstairs. They have a very, very small multipurpose room that is so small they can't even get a table into it to have dinner. The couple, her brother, who is handicapped and lives with them, and Anna and I sat in chairs in the room but couldn't fit a table, so we ate off our laps. Their attitude was marvelous. They were not complaining. They were just grateful to be serving and doing a marvelous job reaching young people and making a difference with such a good attitude.

Tremendous sacrifices are made in many places, but generally the salaries we pay we don't have to apologize for. You have heard me repeat what President McKay said to William E. Berrett when Brother Berrett explained the sacrifices of the seminary teachers. President McKay's comment was, "We hope that they continue to sacrifice because if the spirit of sacrifice is lost in Church education, the spirit

of greed will take over." I have worried about that. That is why I have asked, "Are we too rich? Are we too blessed?" I hope there is always a spirit of sacrifice. I can speak for myself when I say that I thought I had made a tremendous sacrifice in doing what I did. Yet the older I get, the more I realize that when all is said and done and we lay our bodies down for the last time on this earth, the only things that really matter are family, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and friends. If you have those things, what more could you ask for?

The material things in life, in some ways, become a burden. I remember well a very wealthy woman who had lost her husband saying to me, "I came home from the funeral and looked around at all we had accumulated. I thought how blessed my partner is because he is free of all this." The older you get, the more your possessions seem to be an inconvenience that you have to worry about disposing of in some way. The things that matter are the gospel and your family and your friends. I look back on our life, and what a rich, wonderful existence we have had. Anna and I just celebrated our forty-fourth wedding anniversary. We have six beautiful children and sixteen and a half grandchildren. I wouldn't trade that for anything!

As you reflect upon your career, what are you most pleased with?

I am grateful for the family spirit that we have been able to generate in CES. One of the great concerns I had was watching the growth and seeing so many people. I was bound and determined that we were going to keep the family spirit. I put little names on things like the CES conference that we have as the "family reunion" and "family home evening" for our Evening with a General Authority. That is one of the things I'm most pleased about. Even though we are very big, there is a family feeling in CES. I'm grateful for that because we have hung together—because we have enough common bonds and enough feelings for one another that there is a strong family feeling.

If you were to sit down and have an interview with each member of the CES family, what counsel would you give?

There are several things. The hardest thing for me was when I would come home at night and my wife would say, "You had a bad day, didn't you?" She could see it immediately. It was when I would see one of our people being let go because he used poor judgment. They were immoral, they were doing something that was wrong, and they had to leave because of their sins. Let's just face it—they sinned and could no longer be a part of us. I always remember the J. Reuben

Clark story when he was counseling his daughter to be careful. She said, "Daddy, don't you trust me?" His counsel was, "My dear, I don't even trust myself. Because in the wrong situation and under the wrong circumstances, any one of us can fail."

The first thing I would say is, "Watch out. Be careful." Think of the pain of watching people go through the misery of seeing themselves separated from not just Church education but from their membership in the Church, from their family. Watch what happens to those people, the terrible, terrible price they pay for the sins they commit. I would tell them, "You be careful. Don't ever, ever take a chance. Don't ever compromise because it isn't worth it. You are not exempt; no one is."

Another thing I would say is, "Be sure that family is always first and foremost in your life." As busy as I have been and as involved as I have had to be to do what I have done, my family was very, very prominent in my life. I didn't have a lot of time with my family, but I gave quality time when I could. I would be willing to say that in front of my wife and children because they know they were important. You cannot just push the family aside. I don't care who you are, how busy you are, or how important what you are doing is: you must be sure the family has a very high priority. The relationship my wife and I have had has been phenomenal. It has been very unusual because we have hung close together and we have been best friends. I idolize my wife, and she knows it. We have the greatest partnership on the earth. We just love each other, and we have been good to each other and close to each other. We have kept our vows that we took when we went to the house of the Lord. I would say to my people, "You honor your companion. Don't ever belittle your spouse. Love your children and give them your time. Make sure that they know you love them." My baby is thirty years old. It is very depressing to think of having a forty-two-year-old child, and I do! But to this day, whenever I talk to them, the parting words are, "I love you, Dad," and, "I love you, Mark or Brian or Wendy or Julie or Lisa or Laurie," because we just want to make sure that there is no question that they are important, that they are number one. Stay close to your family. Take care of your family.

I would also say, "Don't get too caught up in the material things." We have a humble home. My wife has always said, "You'll never have any money because you give it all away." That's probably true because we have sufficient for our needs. I don't believe in driving new cars; I always buy used cars. Our home is humble, and it is adequate. I don't want to let material things get too important in my life, and they never have. Those kinds of things just don't matter that much to me. I think

you need to be careful that you don't worship idols, the idol of wealth. We don't need all of that stuff. We have too much, and I worry about us all becoming too spoiled and too materialistic. Traveling the world and seeing the humble, poor people of the world who have nothing but the gospel and each other as a family has caused me to think, "You know, they are lucky because they don't have all these other things that cloud the picture. They are focused on the things that matter most because that's all they have." We can get caught up in the material things and start thinking that it's so important to have more and more. Then, we start to say, "I've got to work more, and my wife has to work. I have to have a second job." How much do you need? I don't know. It seems like for some it is never enough no matter what it is. So be careful of the material things.

Finally, something that continually haunts me is that we are not reaching as many of the young people as we should. I've always felt that we could do more to get more young people in, that we could be smarter. I don't think we could work longer hours because I think everybody is working hard. But I think we could be smarter at getting more of our young people involved because we know that it changes lives; we know what effect it has. We sometimes get too comfortable thinking we have reached enough. We can all be more sensitive to how we can just get one or two or three more. We all need to be more cognizant of our responsibility to go out after the lost sheep. The Savior focused on the lost sheep. We need to be looking for those lost ones, never giving up on the ones that seem to be lost, never saying we can't get them. They are retrievable.

You stressed in your last address at the CES conference the importance of teachers' reaching the hearts of students. How do you see teachers achieving that?

Number one, the most powerful thing we have is the Spirit. We can touch those kids' hearts through the Spirit. They may personally be rebellious, but I don't think their spirits are. Their spirits will listen to the Spirit, and that listening will have an impact on any young person. If we can talk heart to heart, if we can speak spirit to spirit, by teaching by the Spirit, young people will respond. I think so many of them are hungry for the things of the Spirit, as President Clark has said. They want those things; they need those things; and their souls are longing to hear the words and to feel the Spirit. We have to teach by the Spirit and love the young people.

I have been a strong advocate for a long time of “teachable moments.” In my life, there were a few very special moments when something just grabbed me and shook me spiritually to the core and changed my life. I can count these incidents on one hand. We can be a party to helping those young people have those special, teachable moments. We’re not going to get everyone, but we need to make sure we do everything in our power to provide teachable moments for young people when they can say, “Yes! That’s what I needed!” You have had those moments when a young person will come up with tears in his or her eyes and say you were speaking just to me today. When you have those experiences, it makes it all worthwhile.

We need to be more sensitive to individuals. We are teaching individual sons and daughters of God. When I was teaching early-morning seminary, my goal used to be that every student, in every class, every day would know that I knew they were there. By some personal acknowledgment, I wanted them to know that I knew they were there and that I loved them. So I tried to do something some way by a little comment to a student or a shake of the hand when they came in or before they left or a little something to let them know, “I am glad you were here today. I love you. Come again tomorrow.”

We are dealing with individuals. Everyone needs to feel that they matter. We need to put more effort into being more personal. We need to feel, “These are my kids. These are my Heavenly Father’s children. I’ve got to make sure that they all feel welcome and feel good about being where they are.” It isn’t easy. There are some days that they are pretty obnoxious, but you have got to love them.

Paul Johnson has succeeded you as the CES administrator. How did those events unfold?

I obviously gave everything that I had for a long time to that program, and I wanted to see it go into the best possible hands. It is not a compliment to you if what you have done for so long falls apart when you leave. I wanted it to work. I wanted it to be in good hands. I prayed fervently that, if given the opportunity, I would be able to make a recommendation, that I would know who it should be. I had gone to the Brethren and told them that I had a spiritual confirmation that it was time for me to leave. I have said for a long time, “How can you quit when your leader is ninety years old?” Yet I had a very strong confirmation that it was time. I had to go.

I visited with the prophet and said, “President, the bucket is dry; there is nothing more I can pull from it. I’m completely worn down.”

It was hard to do because I have never quit anything. Yet he was so kind and so understanding and so loving. As I talked to him, he was so concerned about me. I was asked to make a recommendation, so I gave the names of seven people and a very extensive vita on each one who I felt were possible candidates. I took them in and met with my leaders and gave them the names. They said they appreciated it and then asked me, "Whom of the seven do you recommend as the one?" I told them and they said, "Great. You set up an appointment for us to meet with him." It was Paul. I set up the appointment. Paul asked, "What is this about?" I *lied*: "They want to get better acquainted with our leaders. They know me really well, but they don't know a lot of the others. They just want to meet with you. They are going to meet with many of our people to get acquainted." So he went over and had a meeting totally oblivious to what was coming! After he had met with some of the Brethren, they said, "We think you have chosen the right man. Now the First Presidency wants to meet with him." That was harder to sell as a routine kind of thing. So the secretary to the First Presidency called Paul and said, "The First Presidency wants to meet with you." He came to me and asked, "What's this about?!" I lied *again*: "Well, Paul, I don't know. You'll just have to go find out." He met with the First Presidency, and they invited him to take the assignment.

He is a good man. He is a great soul. His heart is pure. I knew his heart was pure. At the direction of the Brethren, I called his stake president and asked him about Paul. His stake president didn't know the reason I was calling, but he gave him probably as fine a recommendation as he could give anybody. He said, "The man is absolutely and totally grounded in the gospel and is solid as a rock spiritually. His family is as much a role model in our stake as any family could ever be." Paul is a counselor to the stake president. The stake president said, "The man is a peacemaker. Whenever I have a tough situation in the stake that I need help with, Paul is the peacemaker." I told the Brethren what Paul's stake president had said. They replied, "What more could we ask for?"

He is a good man, a man of God, and he will do a great job. I'm very comfortable with Paul. I don't say this to aggrandize myself, but there is only one man who knows what it is like besides me, and that's he! It is a huge job and a very demanding job and very difficult. The Brethren are hard taskmasters, and I don't mean that negatively. They know how important the work is, and they expect it to be done right, and that makes it hard because they do expect excellence.

I have had a very close association for twenty-four years with the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve and the Seventy and the Presiding Bishopric. I have had people say to me on occasion, “Boy, when you are that close to the Brethren, you have to have a strong testimony.” I say to you and to the world that my association with the Brethren just strengthened my testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ, of the work, and of their dedication and commitment. Their hearts are pure, even though they may make mistakes. They do make mistakes; we all make mistakes. But their intent is totally pure, totally committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are prophets of God. I sustain them. I haven’t got one hesitancy or equivocation about any of them. They know where they are going. They are dedicated to the work. If they hurt somebody’s feelings or if they say something that offends, it is not intended. They are only trying to do what they feel the Lord wants them to do. It is hard to be in a key administrative position and not offend somebody.

The sweetest part of the whole experience has been to continually watch the hand of the Lord as He moves the work forward. Many miracles over the years have confirmed this—little moments when you wake up in the night and you know what you ought to say in a talk you are preparing or a talk you’re not even thinking about yet! You get directed, and you know. So many times I have been directed what to say or do. I treasure those beautiful moments when you know you have been directed to do something. I love the Brethren. I sustain them. I’ve watched them in every kind of situation, and they are our Heavenly Father’s mouthpieces here on the earth. I sustain them as prophets, seers, and revelators. There is no equivocation. I am grateful that I have had that privilege to work under their direction. This is the Lord’s work. I have watched it. I have experienced it. I have been the beneficiary of the inspiration of the Lord. I told Paul, “The one thing I regret is that I will lose the mantle, and it will be yours. It is as real as anything you will ever experience. Yes, it’s a paid position, but it is directed by the Lord. You will feel that mantle and responsibility upon you, and you will know. I will lose it because I am walking away.”

I have served my time, and I did the best I could. What a wonderful journey! I have no regrets—only wonderful memories and great appreciation for the blessings the Lord has given to me and my family.

Note

1. Church Educational System, *Annual Information Update—2002* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2002), 5.