



Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel

Volume 15 | Number 1

Article 4

1-2014

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Burton, Linda K. "Home, a Glimpse of Heaven." *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 15, no. 1 (2014): 22-29. <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/re/vol15/iss1/4>

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Linda K. Burton

Home, a Glimpse of Heaven

LINDA K. BURTON

Linda K. Burton is Relief Society general president.

From a *Seminaries and Institutes of Religion* satellite broadcast on August 6, 2013.

I serve as a member of the CES executive committee and board. I love and admire those whom I serve with and testify they are men and women of God. I express my deep love and gratitude to you too. Some among you have taught our children or grandchildren in seminary or institute. And others of you may yet teach our twenty-three grandchildren. Like John, we “have no greater joy than to hear that [our] children [and grandchildren] walk in truth” (3 John 1:4). Thank you for what you have done and will do to help our posterity walk in truth!

About three years ago, I was called to serve as an early-morning seminary teacher for a brief two months before I was called to another assignment. I gained a profound appreciation for what you do to bless the lives of Heavenly Father’s beloved sons and daughters, and I thank my Heavenly Father for you. I also thank Him for the support of my beloved husband as I taught seminary. He went with me each morning to set up tables and chairs and did much, much more. After class each day, he thoughtfully called to see how things had

gone. He shared in the joys, the frustrations, the challenges, and the entirety of the experience. He was and continues to be my cherished companion and my best cheerleader.

To the spouses, thank you for the sacrifices you make and the service you give, both seen and unseen. It takes both husband and wife, working together as a team, in order to bless the youth of the Church. You may sometimes feel invisible as you serve and sacrifice behind the scenes, but our Father in Heaven knows and loves you for what you are doing with great faith within the walls of your own home. You can depend on his promise that what you do in secret will be rewarded openly by Him (see Matthew 6:6).

As a member of the board, I would like to say just a word or two about a sensitive subject. Because we believe in and place great emphasis on the importance of the family in the Church, it could be tempting to think that working in seminary or institute ought to be a little more “family friendly.” With a little planning and thoughtful counseling together, it would be rare that we would ever have to choose between our families and our work. It is not an either-or proposition.

Your consistency and professionalism in being where you have committed to be shows the Lord he can trust you to bless his children when they are most open and ready to learn. What if the teacher wasn’t there on the particular day that a student really needed a special experience? Your consistency blesses those you teach now as well as the Church in the future because, as we all know, those you teach will become the future leaders and teachers of the Church.

A few years ago, in two separate worldwide leadership trainings, President Gordon B. Hinckley emphasized the importance of being a good employee. He said, “Do not neglect your employer or take advantage of him. Give him full measure for the compensation he provides you.”¹

Brothers and sisters, I invite you to commit to abide by this prophetic counsel. As you do so, I promise the Lord will bless you and your family and the students you teach. Be worthy of the prayers offered by members of the Church who are praying for the youth and those who lead and teach them—that would be you.

As I share a few thoughts, I pray the Holy Ghost will bless each of us to see the critical role each has in this seminary and institute work whose purpose is “to help youth . . . understand and rely on the teachings and Atonement of Jesus Christ, qualify for the blessings of the temple, and prepare themselves, their families, and others for eternal life.”²

Several months ago it was my blessing to visit with a recent convert to the Church on the continent of Africa. This beautiful, young girl was just fifteen years old and the only member in her family. As we turned to leave after a lovely visit in her home, we asked if there was anything we could do for her. She eagerly asked us to persuade her father to allow her to attend seminary. Currently, he was forbidding her to do so. When asked why, he said he was concerned for her safety, as she would have to walk to seminary early in the morning in the dark.

The inspired priesthood leader who accompanied us on that visit wisely asked, “Why don’t you go with her? You would be welcome to stay in the classroom and listen to what she is being taught. Will you do that at least two times before forbidding her to attend?”

Her father agreed to do so.

I was talking to my father recently. He is almost eighty-seven years old, but he still remembers with great feeling teaching seminary as a young married man. He remembered a seventeen-year-old girl who was invited to attend his early-morning seminary class by some of her high school friends. At the time, she and her family were not at all active in the Church. She made it clear that she only showed up to seminary because of peer pressure and declared that this would be the only time she would be getting out of bed that early to attend class with them. But on that first day of seminary, she felt something deep in her heart that brought her back every morning the rest of her senior year.

Her love for the gospel grew, and she began to soften and change, which became evident in her behavior at home. One night, her alcoholic father came home in a drunken stupor. This young girl ran to her father, wrapped her arms around his neck, and said, “Oh, Daddy, I love you!” Because she was filled with the Spirit, he was deeply touched. He eventually gave up drinking and returned to activity in the Church, bringing the rest of the family with him.

I’m sure many of you could share similar stories.

One student who understands the depth and breadth of the Atonement of Jesus Christ can yield a profound influence, leading a family to the temple and toward becoming an eternal family. That is why we do what we do in this wonderful work!

As I continued to visit with my father, I asked him what impact he felt his relationship with my mother had on his ability to teach. He said he quickly learned that if things weren’t right at home, he would not have the Spirit. He

confessed that occasionally as he was leaving for seminary, he would have to turn around, go back, and ask for my mother's forgiveness for something he had done. Then he said, "If she was willing to forgive me, all would be well."

That reminded me of Joseph Smith's experience of trying to translate the Book of Mormon when things were not quite right with Emma. When he repented and asked her forgiveness, he was again able to resume translation.

We are familiar with that story. What interested me as I listened to my father was how important it was to both ask for forgiveness as the offending party and to receive forgiveness from the one who had been offended. One of the scripture mastery verses then jumped to my mind. In Doctrine and Covenants 64:9 we are reminded "that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother [or spouse] his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him [or her] the greater sin."

What if the day the less-active girl came to seminary for the first time was a day when things weren't quite right at home with my father and mother? What if my father had not decided to let go of his pride, repent, and ask for my mother's forgiveness? Or what if she had harbored a grudge and had decided not to forgive him that day? It is unlikely that the young girl would have returned to seminary. Perhaps she would not have been filled with the Spirit or been enabled to express her love to her father, who in turn never would have brought his family back into Church activity with him.

As we ponder the vital need to have the Spirit in our homes every single day, we can find help on how to do this in the scriptures. In Doctrine and Covenants 25 the Lord gives inspired counsel that applies to all of us as we seek to have the Spirit in our homes.

1. Comfort and speak "consoling words, in the spirit of meekness" (D&C 25:5).

Think of Sariah, Lehi's wife. We all relate to her because, like all of us, she was very mortal; she didn't always remember to comfort and speak consoling words to Lehi in the spirit of meekness. But what a tremendous impact for good she had when she repented and supported and sustained her husband, testifying of his prophetic calling and teachings (see 1 Nephi 5:2-3, 8). You may not have the privilege of testifying vocally in a seminary or institute classroom setting, but you do have a perfect opportunity to do so within the walls of your own home as a spiritual leader.

2. “Lay aside the things of this world, and seek for the things of a better” (D&C 25:10).

This might mean simply living by the principles taught in the family proclamation, turning your back on the trends of the world. This includes practicing faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities. I find it particularly instructive to note the order of these proclamation principles. Order often suggests priority.

3. “Lift up thy heart and rejoice, and cleave unto . . . covenants. . . . [And] keep my commandments continually” (D&C 25:13, 15).

We have a great opportunity to influence youth for good as we live the gospel by cleaving to covenants and keeping the commandments wholeheartedly and not grudgingly.

What if the day the African girl’s father accompanied her to seminary was a day where the Spirit was absent in the home of the seminary teacher? What if the seminary teacher and his family were living the gospel grudgingly, perhaps keeping the letter of the law but not wholeheartedly? Might an opportunity to influence an entire family be forfeited?

Recently, our leaders have emphasized the importance of strengthening our families through the priesthood. Every family, including families of one—including families where the one is a sister—can have priesthood power in their homes as they cleave to covenants and keep the commandments. I recently received a letter from a sister who said, “I have never known the safety, security, and warmth that comes from having a worthy priesthood holder in my home. . . . The Savior has always taken care of me. . . . He has been, and is, the Priesthood Holder in my home.”

Lifting up our heads and rejoicing suggests that we live the gospel wholeheartedly, like this sister who is a devoted disciple of Jesus Christ.

4. “Continue in the spirit of meekness, and beware of pride. Let thy soul delight in thy [companion], and the glory which shall come upon him [or her]” (D&C 25:14).

I was interested in my mother’s response as my father was reminiscing about his seminary teaching days. She seemed as excited as he was to recount experiences, and she would fill in the blanks as he forgot a detail here or there about some of his students. It was obvious she had shared in that experience with him—the challenges, the joys, and the glory.

As we strive to comfort, console, lay aside the things of this world (including our own pride), rejoice and cleave to our covenants, and keep the commandments, our marriages and families will be strengthened and the Spirit will be there. We will be blessed with occasional glimpses of heaven within the walls of our own homes.

“A man once asked President Spencer W. Kimball, ‘Have you ever been to heaven?’ In response to this question, President Kimball . . . told of a time when he glimpsed heaven at the home of a stake president. The home was small, but the family was large. The children worked together to set the table, and a young child offered a heartfelt prayer before supper. . . . ‘Heaven is a place,’ President Kimball taught, ‘but also a condition; it is home and family. It is understanding and kindness. . . . It is living the commandments of God without ostentation or hypocrisy. It is selflessness.’”³

At age fourteen, I too caught a “glimpse of heaven.” Brother Noel Archibald was my first seminary teacher at the Church College of New Zealand. I had the opportunity of living in close proximity to most of my teachers and often babysat for them. I was impressed by what I learned and felt in the Archibald home while babysitting for them occasionally. I was always invited to kneel with them in family prayer and listened with great interest as Brother or Sister Archibald expressed heartfelt gratitude for the blessing of being sealed in the temple. I had heard Brother Archibald teach about the importance of temple marriage in class and remembered him expressing his love for his wife on numerous occasions. But when I saw this righteous couple hold hands and heard them express gratitude for each other and their temple marriage in prayer, it felt real to me! Living what he taught was the best visual aid I ever saw in seminary!

Although I can’t remember Sister Archibald ever coming to our seminary class, her role was as essential as was his. How could he have testified of the importance of temple marriage unless she were cleaving to her covenants and speaking words of comfort to him or forgiveness as needed? How could he have taught with the Spirit without her willingness to lay aside the things of this world and keep the commandments?

Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught, “There are no perfect families, either in the world or in the Church, but there are many good families. . . . In the healthy family, first and best, we can learn to listen, forgive, praise, and to rejoice in the achievements of others. There also we can learn to tame our egos, work, repent, and love.”⁴

I close with the simple and sweet words that were penned by Stephen Chalmers:

Out of the dreariness,
 Into its cheeriness,
 Come we in weariness
 Home⁵

May our homes be worthy of such a description as we strive to live as devoted disciples of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Surely then, we too will glimpse heaven.

I testify we are known and loved by Heavenly Father and His son, Jesus Christ. I testify we are led by a living prophet, President Thomas S. Monson. I know the Book of Mormon is true and add my witness of that sacred volume, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. **RE**

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Notes

1. Gordon B. Hinckley, “To the Bishops of the Church,” worldwide leadership training meeting, June 19, 2004, 27; see also Gordon B. Hinckley, “Rejoicing in the Privilege to Serve,” worldwide leadership training meeting, June 21, 2003, 22–23.

2. *Gospel Teaching and Learning: A Handbook for Teachers and Leaders in Seminaries and Institutes of Religion* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2012), x.

3. *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2011), 162; see also Spencer W. Kimball, “Glimpses of Heaven,” *Ensign*, December 1971, 36–39.

4. Neal A. Maxwell, “Take Especial Care of Your Family,” *Ensign*, May 1994, 89–90.

5. Stephen Chalmers, in Richard L. Evans, *Richard Evans’ Quote Book* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1971), 28.