

# UTAH AREA BROADCAST: BUILDING UP ZION

Creating Christlike Communities of Faith, Unity,  
Love and Covenant Belonging

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Elder D. Todd Christofferson

Dear brothers and sisters, thank you for your time today. Thank you for your ongoing commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and your participation in His work, your service, and His cause. I continue to enjoy the blessing of working with the Utah Area Presidency. Since we last spoke to you in this format a year ago, area presidency assignments have changed and Elders Evan Schmutz and Jonathan Schmidt have departed to other pastures. Not greener pastures mind you, just other pastures. Elders Kevin W. Pearson and Hugo E. Martinez continue to serve as Area President and First Counselor; now joined by Elder Brian K. Taylor, Second Counselor and Elder Christoph G. Giraud-Carrier as Assistant to the Presidency. Each of them will speak to us in this broadcast. I recommend and endorse their council. What has not changed is the focus of the Utah Area on putting Christ at the center of our lives, joyfully living His gospel, and working to build Zion among us. This will be clear in the messages you hear today. I'm grateful for the fruits of this consistent multi-year area presidency direction. My only concern is what I perceive at times to be an absence of joy as we go about building Zion. Some feel burdened by their participation and service in the church. You yourself may ask from time to time where is that easy yoke, where is that light burden. You'll remember that President Russell M. Nelson taught, "My dear brothers and sisters, the joy we feel has little to do with the circumstances of our lives and everything to do with the focus of our lives. When the focus of our lives is on God's plan of salvation and Jesus Christ and his gospel, we can feel joy regardless of what is happening or not happening in our lives. Joy comes from and because of Him. He is the source of all joy." So, the Area Presidency's focus on Jesus Christ and His central role in God's plan of salvation and in our lives, is the right focus. The leadership instruction held for general and area leaders just prior to general conference last month emphasized the joy of the gospel, including the joy that can be inherent in the Sunday Church experience, in the ordinance of the sacrament, in helping friends and new and returning members feel welcomed and loved and in the connection between worship at home and at church. President M. Russell Ballard wrote to stake and ward leaders on October 27, 2023, last month, informing you that these training materials from the general conference leadership sessions are available to all on the gospel library app. His letter includes specific access instructions. And as President Ballard requested, please review, and use these materials, particularly in your ward and state councils. Obviously, joy is not something that can be forced; it comes naturally or not at all. As I've pondered this subject of joy and living the gospel of Jesus Christ and serving in the Church of Jesus Christ, I've noticed two things I'd like to share with you:

1. The joy that is inherent in gospel covenants.
2. The joy that flows naturally from repentance.

Our covenants with God contribute to our joy and day-to-day living because of the peace and reassurance they provide. Beginning with baptism and following on through the ordinances of the House of the Lord, our promise of obedience to the laws and commandments of God is met with his promises: His spirit to be with us, forgiveness of sins, sanctification, salvation, and exaltation. What a joy it is to know even or especially in desperate or discouraging moments, that eventual and eternal happiness is assured. As Nephi affirmed at such a time in his life, we can also confidently attest: Nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted. Remember the covenant promises are centered in Christ who has all power in heaven and on earth. He, therefore, declares in the world ye shall have tribulation but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world. Bound to Him, we too overcome the world - not only in the end, but in each day. Please stay on the path laid out by our covenant commitments and help others do the same, and that way you gain access to godly power and can live with joy and assurance

daily. President Nelson in 2022 spoke of the joy of daily repentance. He said, "Please do not fear or delay repenting. Satan delights in your misery. Cut it short and cast his influence out of your life. Start today to experience the joy of putting off the natural man. The Savior loves us always, but especially when we repent." It's significant that the scriptures repeatedly connect being filled with joy and having peace of conscience, to repentance. Let me tell you about a personal repentance experience. This happened many years ago while I was serving as a Bishop. My wife and I had a young family of three children, 8 and under, and for several months we had been eagerly anticipating a planned vacation. Just as we were getting in the car to start this vacation, the phone rang. It was a brother in the ward who had been a member of the church for just a few years. His mother had passed away and he wanted me to visit the family and attend her funeral. I expressed my condolences but explained that we would be away on vacation and regrettably would not be able to be with him for the funeral at his mother's church. When we returned, I found out that this brother was deeply hurt and offended that I had, in his view, abandoned him in his hour of sorrow. He stopped attending church. I thought his expectation was entirely unreasonable. My young family made a lot of sacrifices to support my service as Bishop and he should not have expected me to cancel the vacation and time with them that frankly I owed them, especially since I didn't know or had never even met his mother. A couple weeks passed with him not attending church and me feeling quite justified in my position: It was his problem. However, the spirit would not let me rest. Finally, I got up from my chair that Sunday evening and went to this brother's home. I got a cold reception from his wife at the door: I wasn't sure she would let me in. Anyway, we talked for an hour. I apologized for not being with him when he felt he really needed someone. I could see his expectation was rooted in what he grew up with, the traditional duty of the minister of his prior faith. Well, we were reconciled, and we embraced as I left. He came back to church. I had considered myself blameless in the matter, but as I thought more about it, I realized I could have been more helpful to him while still honoring my commitment to my family. I could have called one of my counselors or maybe the Elder's Quorum or Relief Society Presidents to ensure they knew about this mother's loss and could arrange to minister to him, and his family as needed. His home teachers and/or others could have been with him at the funeral. With just a phone call or two, I could have ensured that there was someone to mourn with him as he mourned. I hadn't thought I needed repentance, but in this case, my repentance was to lay aside my self-righteousness and take the initiative to resolve ill feelings between brethren. In the Savior's words, "Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar and their remembrance that thy brother hath ought against thee leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift." The heaviness I had felt for the previous couple of weeks was replaced with joy. I was happy that a brother had been rescued and that my fault, whatever it had been, was gone and I felt approved of the Lord. There is joy in repentance. Thank you for your love of the Lord and the way you serve Him. I pray that you'll be filled with joy and your knowledge of the plan of salvation and the purpose of life. I pray that you'll rejoice in your witness of Jesus Christ and the reach and power of His atonement, including the gift of repentance and the miracle of forgiveness. I express to you my sure witness of the living reality of the resurrected Lord and of the truths of His gospel. May we teach and live them with joy, both at home and in church. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Kevin W. Pearson

Dear brothers and sisters, thank you for joining this special Utah Area broadcast. We express our love and gratitude to each of you for your faithfulness and devotion to the Lord and His church. We love you and pray for you and your family. We've been blessed to hear from our beloved leader, Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. We feel privileged to serve under his apostolic direction. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints has never been stronger. Here in Utah the church continues to grow in numbers, in faith and in spiritual strength. There has never been a better time to live on the earth and never a better time to be a member of the Church of Jesus Christ. In every age cohort, church members are stronger and more faithful than ever before. The narrative of a chorus of church critics would suggest that the church is in decline, but that is simply not true. There have always been those who choose to step away; from the time of Christ to the present day, but the prophetic destiny of the Savior's church is marching on here in Utah and across the world. There's ample evidence of this magnificent mission being fulfilled. You and I have the extraordinary blessing of being part of it. President Nelson declared, "In coming days, we will see the greatest manifestations of the Savior's power that the world has ever seen. Between now and the time he returns with power and great glory, He will bestow countless privileges, blessings, and miracles upon the faithful. Nonetheless, we are presently living in what surely is a most complicated time in history. The complexities and challenges leave many people feeling overwhelmed and exhausted." President Nelson then promised us that we can overcome the world through covenant keeping. What a glorious time to be alive. The Prophet Joseph Smith said, "The building up of Zion is a cause that has interested the people of God in every age. It is a theme upon which prophets, priests and kings have dwelled with peculiar delight. They have looked forward with joyful anticipation to the day which we live." He also said, "We ought to make building up Zion as our greatest object." Alma describes Zion as a people among whom should be no contention one with another, but that they should look forward with one eye having one faith and one baptism, having their hearts knit together in unity and in love, one towards another." Zion refers to the Lord's people who are of one heart and one mind, and dwell together in righteousness. Elder D. Todd Christofferson has taught, "Zion is Zion because of the character, attributes and faithfulness of her citizens." If Zion is characterized by the character and attributes of her people, we must begin by making our own personal lives and homes more sacred and holy. As we place the Savior and sacred covenants at the center of our lives, our homes will increasingly feel more like the temple and the temple will increasingly feel more like our home. President Nelson has strongly urged us to be more intentional in transforming our homes into centers of gospel learning, more intentional in our gospel study and strengthening our faith and testimonies of Jesus Christ. More intentional in seeking for, receiving, and acting upon personal revelation, and more focused on the temple and our sacred covenants. This includes the appropriate wearing of the sacred temple garment which is both a reminder and a symbol of the Savior and of our sacred temple covenants. President Nelson has prophetically warned that in coming days, we will not survive spiritually without the guiding, comforting, healing, and constant companionship of the Holy Ghost. It follows then that we must be equally urgent in making our branches, wards and stakes Christlike communities of faith, love, unity, and covenant belonging, holier places of worship, providing more sacred refuge and secure defense from the gathering and intensifying storms of life around us. Brothers and sisters, tonight we invite you to prayerfully engage with us in considering this important question - What can we do to create Christlike communities of faith, unity, love, and covenant belonging in our wards, branches, and stakes? Each member of the Area Presidency

will address one of four characteristics and attributes crucial to the building up of Zion – a Christlike community of faith, love, unity, and covenant belonging.

1. Enhancing the joy of the Sunday church experience of the saints by helping them feel the love of the Savior.
2. Ministering to one another in higher and holier ways.
3. Creating communities of unity and belonging, void of contention, discrimination, or division.
4. Demonstrating Christlike ministry leadership

I will begin by addressing the first, enhancing the joy of Sunday church experience. We are concerned that in too many wards and branches, we may have become too casual about our sabbath day observance at church. The spiritual opportunity cost to be casual is simply too high for those who come to renew sacred covenants, to feel the love of the Savior and to receive the promise of the Holy Ghost. Christ-centered, spiritually powerful sacrament meetings and second hour instruction build, strengthen, and fortify faith and increase spiritual resilience. They build up Zion and create communities of faith, love, unity, and covenant belonging. Our Sunday worship experience at church should be a sacred, enabling bridge between our homes and the temple; a sacred gathering place characterized by joy and reverence for the Lord Jesus Christ, where, like the temple, everything is centered on Jesus Christ, His atonement and His restored gospel. Where, like the temple, social and worldly influences are left outside so that the Spirit of the Lord and the love of the Savior can be more powerfully felt inside. There are other places, at times, for the discussion of social, political, and secular ideas and topics, but our sacred meeting places are dedicated to worship of the Savior and for sacred ordinances and covenants that bind us to Him. A place where only eternal principles and truths are taught and faith in Christ is kindled and strengthened. A place where hearts and minds can be knit together in unity and love, one towards another. Where each is known by name and accepted, valued, and loved. Hate and envy, divisiveness and contention, animus and discrimination may well characterize much of the communities and world in which we live, but such must be kept outside of our hearts and homes, our sacred meetings, and our holy places of worship. Each member bears responsibility for creating the Christlike community I'm describing. Several years ago, Sister Pearson and I attended the fast and testimony meeting in Soweto, South Africa. It was the most sacred and powerful sacrament meeting we have ever attended. Absolute reverence prevailed as we entered the chapel. All arrived reverently prior to the meeting start. The prayers and singing were heartfelt and stirring. Administration of the sacrament was orderly and sacred. We witnessed 30 individuals, young and old, male and female, stand at the pulpit to bear pure testimony of Jesus Christ, His atonement and resurrection, and the restoration of the gospel. It was moving, it was powerful, it was sacred. All present were deeply influenced by the Holy Ghost. Each of us felt the love of the Savior. It was a sacred time in a holy place we will never forget. Dear branch presidencies and bishoprics, we are looking to you to make this happen in your ward, branch, and stake. Your responsibility for powerful and sacred and joyful sacrament meetings cannot be delegated. Spiritually powerful sacrament meetings centered on the Savior begin with the bishopric and branch presidency who prayerfully and intentionally plan and conduct sacrament meetings to be Christ-centered and focused on the Lord and His atonement, His example, and the doctrines of the restored gospel. Music selected or approved by a member of the bishopric or branch presidency should focus on the Savior, allow members to worship with joyful singing, and should compliment the messages. This is the pattern of general conference, where all music and messages are approved by the First Presidency. Those invited to speak should focus on the Lord Jesus Christ and His restored gospel and bear personal

testimony of Him. Every message should be Christ-centered. Our sacrament meetings should be the highlight of our sabbath day observance. Leaders set the example and show how to be welcoming as they warmly engage with all individuals, smiling, listening, expressing love, gratitude and offering fellowship, and reverently sitting on the stand 7 to 10 minutes before the meeting begins. They create an environment of reverence to help others have a spiritual experience as they listen to soft playing of prelude hymns and participate in the sacred ordinance of the sacrament. The administration of the sacrament should be well prepared in advance of the meeting and those preparing, administering, and passing the settlement should look their best and be on time. Fast and testimony meetings should be focused on bearing brief, heartfelt testimonies of the Savior, His teachings, and the restoration. Parents and teachers should help children learn what a pure testimony is, and younger children should share their testimonies at home or in primary until they are old enough to do so unaided in fast and testimony meeting. Fast and testimony meeting is not for sharing personal stories, experiences, perspectives, or feelings unrelated to the Savior. It is not an open microphone forum for the expression of personal opinions and views. It is sacred time in a holy place centered on Jesus Christ. We hope you will read the teaching segments from the Twelve available in the gospel library under handbook and leadership instruction.

INVITATION TO ACT:

We urge you to prayerfully consider what more can be done in your branch, ward, and stake to become a more Christlike community of faith, love, unity, and covenant belonging. We lovingly charge you with ensuring that the Sunday worship experience at church is joyful, sacred, and centered on the Lord Jesus Christ.

I testify that as we do, our branches, wards, and stakes will build up Zion and accelerate the great gathering of Israel. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Hugo E. Martinez

Building up Zion and creating Christlike communities of faith, love, unity, and covenant belonging begins with Christlike ministering leaders. Our Savior Jesus Christ is the example that we need to follow as we seek to remain on His covenant path that leads us to eternal life. In 3<sup>rd</sup> Nephi chapter 27, verse 27, we read, “What manner of men (and women, I add) ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am.” As fellow servants and leaders in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, we might ask the question, “What manner of leader ought we to be?” President Spencer W. Kimball has said, “We will find it very difficult to be significant leaders unless we recognize the reality of the perfect leader, Jesus Christ, and let Him be the light by which we see the way.” That is the first step in striving to become a Christlike leader, to accept Him as the ideal. The second step follows as we desire to become like Him. In Alma chapter 29, verse 4 we read, “For I know that He granteth unto men according to their desire.” As we follow the example and teachings of our Savior Jesus Christ, we will be able to progress in leading like He led and develop a Christlike ministering mindset. This is described in five ways:

1. Minister to the one.
2. Love like the Savior loves and seek to see individuals the way the Savior sees them.
3. Actively listen to understand and maintain a non-judgmental attitude.
4. Express compassion and empathy – mourn with those that mourn.
5. Teach truth – nourish faith in Jesus Christ and offer hope.

How can we develop such a Christlike ministering mindset as leaders. As we represent our Savior Jesus Christ, we cultivate relationships with those we serve and those we meet. In doing so, we urge you to follow these guidelines:

1. Be approachable.
2. Build relationships of trust with members over time and through meaningful interactions.
3. Be willing to invest time to know them and how the Savior feels about them.
4. Demonstrate genuine care for them and express Heavenly Father and the Savior’s love in our countenance and demeanor.
5. Be aware of and sensitive to individuals from different backgrounds, experiences, and cultures.
6. Recognize that people are trying to do the best they can in their circumstances.
7. Ask questions that provide opportunities for the members to express their feelings and then listen with empathy to their responses.

Empathy has recently been defined by a dear brother, Matthew L. Rasmussen, as “The sensitive act of experiencing vicariously, another person's thoughts, feelings, or experiences. That is the ability to relate to another person's pain, and compassion is the charitable action that stems from that ability. Jesus Christ demonstrated both empathy and compassion as he ministered, blessed, healed, and atoned. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we must learn to experience empathy and extend compassion. These are among the discipleships defining features.” Be careful not to make assumptions about what others feel or why they do what they do. Repeat in your own words what the member has shared, to ensure that you have understood them correctly and completely. Slow down and take time to understand. Remember, you do not have to fix the situation. The best solution is when members come up with their own solutions through their own efforts and seeking guidance from Heavenly Father. I remember when serving as a Bishop, a sister came to me with a difficult situation she was facing. I offered my advice and counsel. The following Sunday was fast and testimony meeting. I was surprised to listen to this sister's

testimony. She said, "I came to Bishop Martinez with a problem, and he was not helpful. Then I thought, I must take this up with Heavenly Father. She continued, my prayers were answered, and I found out for myself what I needed to do. This gave me both the lesson and greater confidence in God. I hope I was more helpful going forward as I pointed the members towards our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. Practice patient listening, trying to understand without planning what you're going to say, seeking inspiration before sharing advice. Until then, keep listening attentively. The Savior not only taught, but he also listened thoughtfully. This enabled Him to answer questions and attend to the needs of others. Consider stories of Jesus as a listener, like the woman at the well, the woman caught in adultery, the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and the two blind men who cried out to Jesus as he departed from Jericho. What can we learn from how the Savior listened. Show that you care. Seek to become more comfortable sitting with someone in their grief. Being present creates a sense of connection that can contribute to healing. The Savior did not rush about. He had time for those He was with. As a leader, after taking time to understand the individual's needs, teach on the doctrine and principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ that may benefit the member. Encourage the members to also seek positive support from others and other resources. Reach out to Family Services to speak to a counselor regarding mental health challenges and refer to them as necessary, sharing encouragement and support. My beloved sisters and brothers, I testify that Jesus Christ is our ideal, our Savior, our Light, our Master and our perfect leader. He wants us to build up Zion, Christlike communities of faith, love, unity, and covenant belonging. Building Zion will require Christlike ministering leaders as we strive to follow Him in our service to Heavenly Father's children. I conclude with one important invitation:

INVITATION TO ACT: Will you strive to become a Christlike ministering leader with a heart and mindset like our Savior possesses?

I pray that we will be so, in the holy name of our Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.



Christophe G. Giraud-CARRIER

One of the focuses of the Utah Area plan and indeed of our individual lives is to become true disciples of Jesus Christ. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. We are grateful for the many who are deepening their discipleship and whose efforts help those around us feel welcomed and loved. Unfortunately, love is not always spoken here. We remain deeply concerned about too many lingering instances of racist attitudes and behaviors taking place in our schools and communities, and sometimes even in our own neighborhoods and places of worship such as seminaries, churches, and temples. In Christlike communities of faith, love, unity, and covenant belonging, this cannot be. Racism is a violation of the first two great commandments – to love God and to love His children. It is sufficiently serious that it may actually impact our opportunity of worshiping in the House of the Lord. One of the temple recommend interview questions indeed asks, “Do you support or promote any teachings, practices or doctrine contrary to those of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. The church's position on racism is unequivocal: All individuals are children of God and part of His divine family. He does not love one race or culture more than any other. Our standing with God depends on our devotion to Him and his commandments, not on the color of our skin, our ethnicity, or other attributes. The commandment to love our neighbor transcends ethnic, cultural, and religious differences.” Striving to follow the Savior's teachings and example, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints condemns racial and cultural prejudice in any form. President Russell M. Nelson has further said that the creator of us all calls on each of us to abandon attitudes of prejudice against any group of God's children. Any of us who has prejudice towards another race needs to repent. Racism has no place in the Lord's Kingdom. It must stop and it must stop now. Racism is manifested in many ways, some quite obvious like bullying, discrimination, ostracizing and demeaning. Others more insidious such as comparing, thinking less of, neglecting, or overlooking others. If we intend to build Zion, which we do, such behaviors and thought patterns must be completely eradicated. They can have no place among us. As Elder D. Todd Christofferson taught, “We should be diligent in rooting prejudice and discrimination out of the Church, out of our homes, and, most of all, out of our hearts.” No loving mother should ever have to hear a child say, “Mom, are you sad that you adopted us? I hate being black.” No army officer should ever have to ask for an emergency transfer, or a family move out of our neighborhoods because their children are being mistreated in our schools and communities. Such things cannot be. It is high time we once and for all put aside our prejudices and enmity towards any others. It is high time we stop excluding anyone and start including everyone. Standing by without saying or doing anything is not an option either for true disciples of the Lord. We can respond with kindness, but we must respond as we protect those who are being unfairly treated. A few weeks ago in the October General Conference, Elder Ulisses Suarez issued the following invitation, “As disciples of Christ, we're invited to increase our faith in, and love for, our spiritual brother- and sisterhood by genuinely knitting our hearts together in unity and love, regardless of our differences.” The scriptures further affirm that, “for by one spirit are we all baptized into one body, nor are there many members yet, but one body, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care, one for another. Christ's plea is for us to be one and avoid contention. Becoming one requires deliberate action. Our dear Prophet, President Nelson, has been pleading with us. Today, I invite you to examine your discipleship within the context of the way you treat others. I bless you to make any adjustments that may be needed so that your behavior is ennobling, respectful and representative of a true follower of Jesus Christ. I bless you to replace belligerence with beseeching, animosity with understanding and contention with peace. In that spirit, we invite families to counsel together in family counsels and home evenings about the importance

of being one in Christ, of treating all people around us with kindness, and the blessings of doing so. Teach your children not to exclude anyone. Make specific family plans about ending bullying over race or differences of appearance, language, or ability. Discuss how to stand for truth and right, exhibit charity and speak out for those who are bullied or treated unkindly. Invite your children to embrace the commitment of: It stops here. It stops now. It stops with me.

INVITATION TO ACT: We invite all organizations, classes, quorums, ward, and stake councils to study the prophetic calls to love God and our neighbor better, and explicitly at welcoming all into our congregations, classes, schools and communities. Teach members and leaders not to exclude nor overlook anyone. Discuss specific actions to end all forms of racism at school, church, or wherever we may be. invite members to embrace the commitment of: It stops here. It stops now. It stops with me.

I testify that we're all children of our loving Heavenly Father, literally and eternally brothers and sisters. I testify again that the way we treat each other is a direct reflection of our understanding of and appreciation for the ultimate sacrifice and atonement of His Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. May we eradicate contention, discrimination, bullying and racism once and for all from our midst. It stops here. It stops now. It stops with me. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Brian K. Taylor

This has been beautifully inspiring. One of the crucial characteristics of a Zion culture or these Christlike communities of faith, love, unity, and covenant belonging we are discussing is compassionate ministering. As I begin my message titled, "Creating a culture of ministering in higher and holier ways," I share an impactful and perspective refining story of John Huntsman, a dear brother many of you have heard of. When he was called as a new Stake President, the story is told that he called his father-in-law, Elder David B. Haight of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and asked him if he would train him in his new calling. Elder Haight readily agreed and invited John to his home. Imagine Brother Huntsman walking into Elder Haight's living room, pulling out his yellow legal pad, pen in hand, and excitedly saying, "I'm ready." So Elder Haight begins, "John, #1 is to visit and minister to the widows and the fatherless, the poor and the needy. This is the most important, the number one priority in your ministry." We can see in our mind's eye, President Huntsman writing it down and then quickly on the next line writing #2, circling it like on this pad and then looking back up. Elder Haight continues, "Are you ready for #2?" "Yes, absolutely!" Well, there is no #2 John. "That's it, that's my training. Go lovingly minister to your flock for the Lord Jesus Christ." While we learn how and where our Savior ministered in the next few verses, remember this powerful truth in your ministering, you literally represent Jesus Christ. First scripture: And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid and sick of a fever and He touched her hand and the fever left her. Number two: Now it came to pass as they went that He entered a certain village and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. Number three: And Jesus went about all Gailee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the Kingdom and healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people. This pattern of Jesus ministering to others in homes and among the people is important for us in Utah. I remember well one cold December night, 22 years ago, just three days before Christmas. My beautiful Jill was in her 9th month of pregnancy with our seventh child. Shopping lists, cards, and mountains of other preparatory things to do before Santa came. We can all relate to this. I remember a soft invitation we had received to visit a dear friend of ours on his birthday. This remarkable soul, now 24 years old, who at birth was only given six weeks to live because of a severely crippling condition, was now barely able to whisper from a bed he could hardly move around in. We dearly wanted to see him, but I wondered if we would make it with all the hustle and bustle and six children now ages 2 to 13 in tow. I'm sure it was my dear Jill who made this happen. As we arrived at their home, thinking we would be the ones doing the ministering that night, we were greeted by Sister Blaser with her usual loving hugs. Smiling she said, "Brady has been so excited to see you tonight. He has gifts he wants to give to each one of your children." I remember thinking, oh, what if we would not have come, been distracted by all the tinsel and glitter, and not made it tonight. We would have missed the pure joys of friendship and the true meaning of Christmas. (Or in Spanish, Christ Moss or Moss Christo) Jill and I were overcome with Brady's and Earline's loving kindness that night and this remains a treasured experience which was multiplied a hundredfold only a couple weeks later as we learned of our dear friends crossing the veil. Remember the great promise, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name as touching one thing, behold there will I be in the midst of you." I know the Savior was with us that night and I testify that He will be there with you, in these gatherings, in homes and among the people in your ministries. Life is meant to be a compassionate ministering journey and not like the stern bank president who said to the man who came in to get a loan. The man begging and pleading for a loan to help him with his family, the bank president said, "Well fine, I have a glass eye. If you can answer that one question, which one of my eyes is the glass eye, I'll give you the loan." The man responded immediately, "It's your right

eye." The bank president said, "How in the world could you tell?" And the man said, "It's the only one that showed a little compassion." So, think about that in our ministering journeys. We're here to selflessly help gather Israel, to willingly assist our Heavenly Father and our Savior at bringing their children home. Question: What caused the Good Samaritan in that famous parable to stop and minister to the wounded man who was half dead, when the priest and the Levi had passed by on the other side? We are only given this one reason – when the Samaritan came where he, the wounded man was, and when he saw him he had compassion on him and went to him and bound up his wounds pouring in oil and wine and set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn and took care of him. Our Prophet, President Nelson, recently taught us "One of the easiest ways to identify a true follower of Jesus Christ is how compassionately that person treats other people." Listen once more for the word compassion in these tender verses in our Savior's ministry: "And it came to pass that when Jesus had thus spoken, He cast His eyes round about again on the multitude and beheld they were in tears and did look steadfastly upon Him as if they would ask Him to tarry a little longer with them. And He said unto them, "Behold my bowels are filled with compassion towards you. Have ye any that are sick among you, bring them hither. Have you any that are lame or blind or halt or maimed or leprous or that are withered or that are deaf or that are afflicted in any manner, bring them hither and I will heal them for I have compassion upon you. My bowels are filled with mercy." Pray diligently to be filled with this compassion which moves us to act, to love and lift others in higher and holier ways like our Savior does. I conclude with one more life lesson learned almost 30 years ago when, as a young man sitting in a meeting with Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, I heard him say, "Jesus did not have an office." Imagine the impact of that one line – "Jesus did not have an office," which has remained with me and shaped my ministering efforts ever since. Now brothers and sisters, because of the great blessing of living in close proximity to members and friends, and with Elder Holland's one line lesson in mind,

INVITATION TO ACT: We wholeheartedly, as an Area Presidency, invite every ministering companionship (in Utah) to regularly visit our assigned members in their homes. Pray with them. Teach them. "Lift up the hands which hang down." Laugh and cry with them. The Savior taught, "...verily I say, whomsoever you bless I will bless" So let's do that with the power and authority of our Savior with us and bringing a young man or a young woman as your companion when assigned, provides a beautiful opportunity to teach and mentor them on their ministering journey to become the followers of Jesus Christ as well. Thank you all for your selfless and tireless efforts to reach out to so many in higher and holier ways. We love you and we all need one another in this great ministering work of the Lord. It is our sincere hope that we may all be moved to minister by a greater measure of this soul stirring attribute of compassion and do as Jude teaches in the New Testament, "And of some have compassion, making a difference." In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.