

13- Too often, we complicate the beauty and simplicity of the gospel of Jesus Christ with endless lists of meticulous expectations. However, when we focus on the “why” of the gospel, much of the confusion fades away. 14- Why are we here? Why are we asked to obey the commandments? Why is the Atonement of Jesus Christ of such value to us?

15- The proper “why” questions will lead us to the proper “who,” “what,” “when,” “where,” and “how” decisions.

16- Elder Ballard and his group gave us a great example by asking, “Why do we meet in councils? Is it to arrange and rearrange the ward calendar? to discuss staffing problems? to schedule cleaning the building?”

17- Such issues may be urgent and necessary, but are they the most important? There are many ways to enhance our precious council time, like always coming well prepared. We could handle scheduling or other organizational matters by memo, phone, e-mail, or text. When we allow organizational matters to dominate our efforts and time in our councils, we run the risk of missing the mark of why the Lord has called us to minister in His Church.

18- We meet in councils to seek the inspiration of the Spirit in building the kingdom of God. We meet to seek the answers to two basic questions:

1. How can we help our members better love the Lord our God with all their heart, soul, and mind?

2. How can we help our members better love their neighbors as themselves?

19- Every other thing we discuss in our councils within our Church organizations should derive from these great commandments, for everything else hangs upon them.

20- Once we understand the “why” behind our council meetings, it is easier for us to focus appropriately on *how* to accomplish it. For example, as we consider ways to increase love for neighbor among our members, we might decide to plan a service activity in which we include our less-active members and our friends of other faiths.

21- All of our discussions concerning young and old, from welfare needs to missionary work, from gospel teaching to strengthening families, should be framed in this context.

22- By simplifying and strengthening the council process and by inviting the Spirit, we will find the life and fire of the Holy Spirit, who provides guidance and heavenly support for our efforts.

23- Some may be tempted to say, “Just tell us what to do, and we’ll do it.” While we commend a righteous desire to be obedient, there is more to leadership in the Church (and more to life) than simply checking items off an assigned to-do list.

24- As you have noticed, the new handbooks do not specify in great detail every action you are to take in your calling. These handbooks were provided for the right amount of structure without regimenting every detail. It might be wise to look at the handbooks and even the scriptures not as checklists or detailed scripts but rather as opportunities to prepare our minds and hearts to receive divine inspiration for our responsibilities.

25- Unfortunately, we sometimes don’t seek revelation or answers from the scriptures or the handbooks because we think we know the answers already.

26- Brothers and sisters, as good as our previous experience may be, if we stop asking questions, stop thinking, stop pondering, we can thwart the revelations of the Spirit. Remember, it was the questions young Joseph asked that opened the door for the restoration of all things. We can

block the growth and knowledge our Heavenly Father intends for us. How often has the Holy Spirit tried to tell us something we needed to know but couldn’t get past the massive iron gate of what we thought we already knew?

27- Another topic I would like to discuss is the difference between growth and real growth. We have heard some about this today. In Church terms, growth could be defined as new members. New members come through children baptized at age eight as well as convert baptisms. Real growth, however, is defined as growth in the number of active members.

28- In some areas of the Church we have dramatic growth in new members, yet active membership remains stagnant or grows only a little. We have some measurable ways to indicate activity in the Church, such as sacrament meeting attendance, ordination to the priesthood at the right age, missionary service, and possession of a current temple recommend. Perhaps the more accurate indicators of real growth in the gospel of Jesus Christ are those that we can’t measure as easily, such as daily prayer, scripture study, family home evening, love at home and for our neighbor, and personal experiences with Christ’s Atonement. These are recorded not by a clerk in Church records but in our hearts and in heaven.

29- Our missionary efforts are compromised if we baptize God’s children but do not maintain love and friendship with these precious new members who are excited to find fellowship with the Saints and a place of belonging in the household of God.

30- Here again, our councils can deliberate on the spiritual and temporal welfare of every member—taking special care to consider each new convert. Our work as a council is to help our members grow in their love for Heavenly Father and their fellowman. If we focus our efforts here, one-on-one, many more members will feel that they have found a home in the Church—that they have found the “why” of the gospel.

31- Brothers and sisters, let us remember that you and I are not perfect. Consequently, our councils will not be perfect either. At times they will be understaffed. At times they may include one or perhaps several people who are not fully engaged in the work or who are distracted by the complications and stresses of everyday life.

32- Please do not give up. Be careful not to over-idealize your expectations of how your councils should operate. Once again, if you are focused on the “why” of the gospel, the Spirit will direct your humble efforts.

33- President Hinckley once said, “We are here to assist our [Heavenly] Father in His work and His glory, ‘to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man’ (Moses 1:39). Your obligation is as serious in your sphere of responsibility as is my obligation in my sphere.”² What a humbling statement by a prophet of God.

34- If your circumstances are less than ideal, please take comfort in knowing that the Lord will support and enhance your efforts, sanctify your decisions and actions, perfect them through the tender mercies of Christ, and “consecrate [your] performance ... , that [it] may be for the welfare of [your] soul” (2 Nephi 32:9) and the souls of those you serve.

35- As I mentioned earlier, there is little good in hearing the word of God if we do not translate what we hear into our lives. Consequently, we ask that you take the following steps without hesitation and continue to do so throughout your service in your callings.

36- First, individually and as councils, prayerfully consider the instruction you have received. Think of priesthood power in the home, honoring divine covenants, rescuing

others, focusing on the one, strengthening our youth, and building eternal marriages and families by applying gospel principles in our daily lives.

37- As you consider these topics, ask yourself about the “why” of your service and ministry and the resulting “therefore what” in your responsibilities as individuals and as councils. In this process, please open your hearts and minds to the will of heaven, and I promise that the Spirit will reveal the things that matter most—for you, your family, and your responsibilities in the Church.

38- Second, as a result of pondering and discussion, determine a few specific actions you will commit to implement. Please keep in mind that the actions of each organization, ward, stake, family, and individual may be different. They should fit your circumstances and needs. The unity we seek is not necessarily that we all do exactly the same things at the same time but that we each listen to and always follow the direction of the same Holy Spirit.

39- Third, once you have made these commitments, follow up on them within the scope of your responsibilities and callings at each of your council meetings. Please do this. We ask you also to bring your decisions and efforts before the Lord in your daily prayers and ask for further light and direction. Trust Him. He knows you, and He loves you.

40- My dear brothers and sisters, we love and admire you; we pray for you. We know that you desire to heed the whisperings of the Spirit, to follow the Savior, and to be His hands in this great work. I bear witness that this work is true, that you are called of God. The Savior is at the head of this Church with President Monson as His prophet.

41- Dear friends, may you always find joy in your righteous service is my blessing and my prayer, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. See Harold B. Lee, in *Teaching, No Greater Call* (1999), 52.

2. Gordon B. Hinckley, “This Is the Work of the Master,” *Ensign*, May 1995, 71.

Acting on the Truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ

DIETER F. UCHTDORF

Second Counselor in the First Presidency

Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, Feb. 2012

1- My dear brothers and sisters, thank you for being with us today. President Monson has asked that I speak to you. He sends his love and blessings to all of you.

2- We know you have set aside other things to attend this worldwide training session, and we commend you for your faithfulness. We love you for your willingness to consecrate your time, talents, and resources to building the kingdom of God.

3- We have received wise counsel today from those who have devoted their lives to hearing and heeding the voice of the Holy Spirit. We urge you to carefully consider their counsel.

4- Of course, we know that hearing words of counsel and acting upon them are two very different things. The Savior spoke of the difference when He said that those who hear and obey are like those who build their houses upon a rock. And those who hear but don’t follow—well, they could just end up being ex-home owners.

5- Church members are wonderful in their desire to be obedient and follow the Lord. But sometimes, in spite of our good intentions, we delay doing what we should do or we misunderstand what we were taught. As a result, inspired words of counsel might not have the promised effect.

6- I am reminded of a story about a woman who had a dream in which her husband gave her a beautiful necklace she had always wanted. When she asked her husband what he thought the dream meant, he smiled as only a loving husband can and said, “You’ll find out tonight!”

7 That evening the husband came home and handed his wife a beautifully wrapped present. She opened it with deep appreciation for her sensitive husband, only to find a book entitled *A Guide to Understanding Dreams*.

8- President Harold B. Lee has said to the teachers of the Church that it is not only important to be understood but also not to be misunderstood.¹

9- So the first thing we must do is understand. The second is to put our understanding into action. This is the “Put Your Shoulders to the Wheel” part.

10- In that spirit, and building on what Elder Ballard’s group discussed, I would like to offer some additional counsel and then a few suggestions as to how you might implement what you have heard today.

11- We human beings have a strange tendency to complicate simple things. We set up rules, laws, bylaws, processes, and subprocesses. Eventually, we pile up load after load until we end up under a huge weight of expectations that are so complicated it is difficult to keep track of them, let alone meet them.

12- This is one of the reasons Paul said, “The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (2 Corinthians 3:6).