

**President Esplin's
Willow Creek Stake Conference
8 October 2016
General Session Talk – 12 min**

- **Hong Kong.** This past week I was on business in Hong Kong and China. It took me back 34 years ago when I first flew to Hong Kong and back packed through China for a month as a student - not long after it had opened up to tourism.
 - At the time, I had been dating Kaye for 1 year and was considering proposing to her. I went to a certain street where they sold pearls and bought her a pair of pearl earrings for pierced ears. When I returned I gave her the earrings – she said they were lovely, but that she didn't have pierced ears. It was true love when she went out and got her ears pierced the next week. I hope I have learned to be more observant as a husband than I was as a boy friend.
 - As much as I travel for business – I love coming home to my wife and family and this wonderful Willow Creek area.

- **SA Ward.** We have had significant changes to our Stake since we last met. We welcome the Draper, Single Adult Ward that was organized in June and now has 400 wonderful active members that draw from the 28 stakes in Draper and Sandy. It is one of 9 SA Wards that has been organized in the valley.

- **Children/Youth.** There continues to be a changing demographics in our neighborhoods with most of our wards experiencing larger primaries. Today, our 7 family wards have 560 primary age children and nearly 300 Young women and Young men age.

- **Sindex.** Years ago People Magazine took a poll and asked people to estimate how guilty they would feel if they engaged in 51 activities ranging from murder to nude sunbathing. As you might expect – murder was rated the worst with a score of 9.84 and taping off of TV was rated the lowest with a score of 1.76. But what was interesting was that cutting in line was ranked higher than unwed parenthood. Parking in a handicapped zone was ranked worse than premarital sex. And overeating was rated worse than viewing pornography. If the poll were taken today even worse. We live in an age of increasing moral relativism where good is called bad. Our children need to be taught.

- **Media Rules.** Those of you who have been in our home may have seen the “Esplin Media Rules” posted on our refrigerator or magnet board. It includes rules like:
 - No TV or internet when home alone or after Mom and Dad are in bed.
 - No R Rated Movies and Ask permission to see PG-13 movies
 - 10 minute reporting rule. – that is if you see something accidentally to tell Mom and Dad within 10 min

- There was a time when I could control TV watching. I never would have allowed a TV in a child's room. We clearly need to update our rules with technology changes. Today with wifi and smart phones – children often have access to media 24/7 if they choose, even late at night in a bedroom.

- I am increasingly concerned about what comes into our homes in the form of **crude sitcoms and reality shows full of innuendo.** Some families have them turned on in the kitchen as the

family prepares a meal. I am **frankly angry about the rough and increasingly base political discourse** that is brought into my home through main stream media outlets like CNN or NPR.

- Oh Parents – please be wise & prayerful and take time in a family council to set media rules.
- **FHE/Sunday.** The Church has established 2 special times for families to be together.
 - 1st is Sunday. Sunday should be centered in the proper observance of the Sabbath day. In addition to regular meetings, scripture study, and naps - our family has enjoyed reading good books, visiting relatives, playing family board games, and going on walks together. For me, Sunday evenings are the most important time of the week. I have read aloud to my family the entire Harry Potter books and many other classics. Church leaders have been asked to avoid scheduling meetings on Sunday evenings. Now if I can get my children to get their homework done earlier!
 - The 2nd is Monday night. We are to teach our children in a well-organized, regular family home evening. No other activities should be scheduled on Monday night.
- **Time.** Life seems to get more and more complicated and busy. We need to be prepared to make sacrifices in order for the family to be together.
 - **Elder L Tom Perry.** Elder Perry tells the story about moving from California to NY City for new job and began the process of looking for a home – looking in communities closest to the city first and gradually moving out. They found a beautiful home some distance from the city nestled in the lovely deep woods of Connecticut. The final test before purchasing the home was to test the time it took to commute to NY by train. It took 1 ½ hours. He said: “I walked into our motel room where our family was waiting for me and presented to my children a choice. **You can have either this house, or a father’.** **Much to my surprise they responded “We’ll take house. You are never around much anyway”. I was devastated. What my children were telling me was true. I needed to repent fast. My children needed a father who was home more. Eventually we reached a compromise and bought a home closer to the city, with a much shorter commute. I changed my work habits to allow me to have more time with my family.”**
- **Allegory of Olive Trees.** Years ago as a newly called High Councilman in this Stake, Pres Keith Adams taught me an important lesson. We were meeting with the newly called Stake YW and YM leaders and planning out the calendar. We of course had lots of ideas and were eager to make our mark. He opened up the Book of Mormon to Jacob 5 – the allegory of the tame and wild olive trees. He reminded us of how:
 - **That the Olive tree began to get old and decay, and in order to preserve it branches were grafted in.**
 - **In the end, the tree brings forth lots of different kinds of fruit – but none of it was good.**
 - **The solution – cut it back. The roots were good but the branches had grown faster than the roots. The answer was cut the branches back to allow the good roots to take hold.**
 - **Once it was cut back – the natural fruit returned.**
- One lesson from Allegory – cut things back to allow the roots to take hold. If you aren’t having family home evening or regular family time – cut back.
- **Patrick.** Dear friend on East Coast. Intense job. I asked him how often he has dinner with family during the weekday – almost never. How are your weekends – hockey and lacrosse with 3

children. My wife takes one and I take the other. He needs to cut back. Lots of fruit – possibly none good.

- **Confidence.** Often parents program their children to help build confidence. Remember what the Lord said about building confidence ..”*Let thy bowls also be full of charity towards all men.. and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly: then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of god.*” Confidence before God is a synonym of Faith. Virtue is the key faith.
- **Letter from Mom and Dad.** My mother and father were killed in two separate car accidents within 6 months of my returning home from a mission. I was in both of the car accidents. Following the funerals - As the youngest in the family with all my sisters married and established – we all came together in the family home to prepare it for sale. As we cleaned out one of the rooms we found a letter from Mom and Dad – addressed to us their children. What a treasure.
 - In it they express their love for each one of us as individuals.
 - ***“Fine clothes, big homes, fancy food, important positions, exotic travel, fancy cars, lots of money – we hope you all have some or all of them, but they are not what this life is all about. Having a good strong testimony of the gospel that is constantly growing and strengthening, striving to live Christ like lives, serving others – family and the Lord first, enduring to the end – are things that really matter in this life.***
 - That is that is the same message I wish to leave my children. That they may struggle to find success professionally, struggle to pay the mortgage each month and never receive a significant calling in the church – but if they have been faithful – I will fall on my knees and thank my Heavenly Father that they truly have been successful.
- **Family History.** Great promises have been made by modern Apostles to our youth regarding the work of family history.
 - Elder Bednar said *“As you participate in and love this holy work, you will be safeguarded in your youth and throughout your lives”*.
 - And Elder Cook said *“Don’t underestimate the influence of the deceased in assisting your efforts and the joy of ultimately meeting those you serve.”*
- **James W LeSueur (Lesweer).** Reading the life history of my wife’s ancestor James LeSweer who lived in St Johns Arizona during the turn of the century.
 - **Patriachal Blessing:** ***“At the touch of thy guardian angel they spiritual vision shall be quickened; thou shalt look beyond this world of flesh into a world of spirits and behold its beauty and order and commune with thy dead for their redemption”*** – What a remarkable blessing for a young man to receive.
 - 4 years after this blessing – after serving 2 years as a missionary on the island of Jersey in the UK– notified his brother Frank had been killed. Frank had been waiting for James to return so that he could serve a mission.
 - After returning home and while camping out with is father during an inspection of the sheep herd James had a strong desire to see his brother. As they prepared to go to bed he left his father and knelt down and prayerfully asked the Lord to see Frank. He then returned to sleep next to his father. He then felt his spirit leave his body, ***“I saw my body lying beside my father and then the personage standing beside my spiritual body. The personage was dressed in white and I knew he was my guardian angel. He said, come, go with me”***
 - They went up above the trees and then over hills, valleys, cities and seas – in a few moments came to a large city. He was made to understand it was where spirits awaiting the

resurrection lived. James comments on the beauty of the streets lined with trees and flowers, and the simple grandeur of the buildings.

- When he approached a certain building the Door was opened by a young lady – the attending angel informed him ***“This young lady is a relative of yours...She is now doing missionary service among your relatives who have died without a knowledge of the Gospel, and the people assembled here are your relatives waiting to hear the Gospel preached to them”***
 - Viewed a large room (of the size of the Tabernacle – 10,000 to 12,000 people) listening to a speaker dressed in white – whose back to him. The man taught the same things James had been teaching in Jersey – faith, repentance and baptism. However, when in discussing baptism – he taught that it was an ***“earthly covenant, and must be made while in mortality, but that it could be attended to vicariously for them by living relatives and friends acting as proxies..”*** He explained to them that there were faithful relatives now gathering their names for earthly records and going into Temples and doing the essential saving service for them.”
 - When the man turned – he saw that it was his brother Frank and beheld ***“the transcendent bliss that enveloped him.” I thought “Oh if I could attain such supernal joy I would be willing to go through any preparation that the Lord desired for me”***
 - He visits 2 other rooms.
 - One room was full of groups of 30 or 40 with a teacher of each group teaching them to read, write and spell like a common grade school room. They were being prepared with basic education to be taught the gospel.
 - James LeSwee was shown that in the spirit world we are organized as families and it is our responsibility to teach and save our own family. He became dedicated to family history work and was remembered by his children to come home after a long day of genealogical research and joyously say “I found a new ancestor today! ‘
- For years I have had a desire to do temple work for my ancestors. But try as I might – I couldn’t find any. Until a few years ago – my teenage daughter Claire was called as a Ward Family History Consultant. She found dozens of family names and last year I took one of those names to the temple. It was an incredible experience. It was like taking one of my own children to the temple for the first time.
 - Could I ask you to do something this next year? Could I ask each one of you 12 years and older to take a family name to perform an ordinance for in the temple?
 - I love what Elder Packer said:
 - ***“I have studied much in the scriptures and have taught from them. I have read much from what the prophets and apostles have spoken. They have had a profound influence upon me as a man and as a father. But most of what I know about how our Heavenly Father really feels about us, his children, I have learned from the way I feel about my wife and my children and their children. This I have learned at home. I have learned it from my parents and from my wife’s parents from my beloved wife and from my children, and I can therefore testify of a loving Heavenly Father and of a redeeming Lord.”***