

Choosing Christ by helping to gather Israel

Willow Creek 3rd Ward

Bishop Rich Goaslind

1<sup>st</sup> Counselor Don Stepan

2<sup>nd</sup> Counselor Brett Hopkin

Good Morning Brother and Sisters my name is Clint Weaver for those who do not know me. I live in the 6<sup>th</sup> ward with my wife Sarah and my family. I have 3 daughters. Elizabeth who returned from serving a mission in Honduras Tegucigalpa in December and is attending BYU, Kathryn who graduated from Brighton High School attends BYU and has a mission call to the Brazil Fortaleza East mission, but has been reassigned to Ohio Cincinnati Mission. And our youngest is Rebekah who is going into her sophomore year at Hillcrest High School. I feel so blessed being here in the 3rd ward today. I bring to you the love of our Stake Presidency. I have the most-firm testimony of just how much President Staples, President Matheson and President Smith love us in the Sandy Utah Willow Creek Stake. I testify of the love Bishop Goaslind, Brother Stepan and Brother Hopkin have for you here in the 3<sup>rd</sup> ward. I testify with all of my heart that these men pray for us daily and receive inspiration and revelation for us.

I have the awesome opportunity and a unique position as I serve on the High Council in the Stake and I get the wonderful and exciting chance to work with the youth as the Stake Young Men's President. As a High Councilor, I get to share a message from our Stake Presidency and as the Stake Young Men's President I get to share a message directed to the youth of our wards. I love it. I feel so blessed to provide my thoughts and testimony to the entire ward and a to share a message for our youth. Today I will be sharing my thoughts about Gathering Israel.

In 2020, we have been introduced to the Children and Youth program. The youth of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are beloved sons and daughters of

Heavenly parents. You have the power and potential to make an incredible impact on the world. In this unprecedented time in history, a pandemic, social issues, and a shift in religious ideals in our nation the children and youth initiative teaches you Young Women and Young Men the principles to live a higher and holier way. In Luke 2:52 we read: "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man." Jesus grew in a balanced way and so should our youth. Isn't that wonderful, you have challenges and opportunities to shape your lives and the lives everyone around you.

To all members of the 3rd ward, however with a special invitation to those Young Men and Young Women who joined the young women's 12 – 13-year-old class and Deacons Quorum at the first of the year, I invite you to revisit and reread President Russell M. Nelson's June 3, 2018 Worldwide Youth Devotional and answer his call to action and join the youth battalion working to gather Israel. I bear witness that as you follow the prophet's guidance and teachings you will be blessed. President Nelson said in this devotional that the rising generation is the "Hope of Israel." How do you do this? Work in a home-centered / church supported way. Elder David A. Bednar said in his April 2019 General Conference address: "The ultimate missionary training center is in our homes; secondary missionary training centers are located in Provo, Manila, Mexico City, and in other locations. Our most instructive Sunday School classes should be our individual and family study in our places of residence; helpful but secondary Sunday School classes are held in our meetinghouses. Family history centers now are in our homes. Supplemental support for our family history research work also is available in our meetinghouses." Stop and think about Elder Bednar's words from over a year before COVID pandemic changed our lives. He counseled that the ultimate missionary training center is in our homes. As mentioned earlier, my daughter Kathryn has received a mission assignment to labor in the Brazil Fortaleza East Mission. She was to report to the Sao Paulo Brazil MTC on August 19. She will not be going to the Sao Paulo MTC; she will instead be going through the MTC at home. So will other missionaries around the world be attending MTC in their homes. Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf recently

said in social media post titled, Embracing the Future of Missionary Work: “The last few months have brought unprecedented changes to missionary work. We have moved many missionaries home, as other missionaries have stayed in their missions. Throughout this time, I have received hundreds of messages from missionaries who attend MTC at home, or serve in their mission under challenging COVID-19 circumstances. They share with me how they focus on the things they can do and not so much on what they cannot.” What a powerful message. We can love each other, we can embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ more fully, we can do extraordinary things. Elder Uchtdorf goes on to say: “The future of missionary work is bright. We are learning much and the Lord has lessons in store for all of us as we seek to hear Him and find new ways to share His gospel. Now, is our turn to make the best we can out of this. I hope that we will not yearn to move back to something that didn’t work well in our lives before COVID-19, but rather look to the future with hope. May we each use this time to become more refined, edified, empowered, and refreshed to move forward. Please take this unusual time to Hear Him and gather Israel.”

To all the primary children, Young Women and Young Men, Quorum and class presidencies, and to the Bishopric of the 3rd ward, I invite you to embrace the materials in print and online with regards to the children and youth program. Study the Young Women’s theme and Aaronic Priesthood theme. Please take time, if you have not already done so, and prayerful set your 2020 goals in the four areas of emphasis: Spiritual, Social, Physical and Intellectual. The principles we learn in this exercises will strengthen your faith muscles. You will have the strength to remain on the covenant path. Working together as youth, parents and leaders you young women and young men will become disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ and become women and men of integrity, I testify of that. Elder Jeffrey R Holland taught in is October 2008 General Conference address titled “The Ministering of Angels” the following... “I have spoken here of heavenly help, of angels dispatched to bless us in time of need. But when we speak of those who are instruments in the hand of God, we are reminded that not all

angels are from the other side of the veil. Some of them we walk with and talk with— here, now, every day. Some of them reside in our own neighborhoods. Some of them gave birth to us, and in my case, one of them consented to marry me. Indeed heaven never seems closer than when we see the love of God manifested in the kindness and devotion of people so good and so pure that *angelic* is the only word that comes to mind”. I can take the liberty to add to Elder Holland’s list that of Bishopricks, Young Men and Young Women’s leaders. The kindness and devotion they have for you is angelic. To the Primary, young women and young men we love you and we are rooting for you!

As a Stake Presidency, President Staples, President Matheson and President Smith prayed faithfully for guidance about setting our Stake goals for 2020. Our Stake Presidency has a deep desire to have each member of the Stake actively choose to follow Christ and incorporate his attributes into their lives.

It is very important that we emphasize both aspects of the goal as each have significant importance. First we choose to follow Christ and second we choose to adopt his attributes into our daily lives. The action of choosing implies a continual act not something that is simply one and done as we have to actively adopt Christ-like attributes and imprint them on our testimony and on our soul. I pray that my remarks today can touch the one in our midst. I also pray that someone in our congregation will feel the love of our Savior and will be moved to grow closer to him. He is the one that atoned for us and He makes it possible for each of us to have happiness and joy.

Old Testament prophecies told the children of Israel that, although they would be scattered among the nations, they would also one day be gathered again. Within months of the organization of the Church in 1830, a revelation was given to Joseph Smith instructed newly baptized members to leave their homes and “gather” in unto one place upon the face of this land.” Additional revelation designated Ohio as the first place of gathering. Many new church members gathered to Kirtland, Ohio and to Jackson County Missouri area.

The gathering gained energy in April 1836 when the Old Testament prophet Moses appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple and gave them the “keys of the gathering of Israel from the four parts of the earth, and the leading of the ten tribes from the Land of the North.” Apostles Heber C. Kimball and Orson Hyde were soon called to England, thus establishing the Church’s first overseas mission. Thousands of converts began to flock to Latter-day Saint Stakes in Ohio, Missouri, and later, Illinois. In Nauvoo, Illinois, the Saints established a large Stake of Zion and began building a new temple. The prophet Joseph Smith taught that in one sense, “the whole America is Zion,” and the Saints could gather anywhere so long as there was a temple. He explained that the “main object” of the gathering was “to build unto the Lord a house whereby He, the Lord, could reveal unto His people the ordinances of His house and glories of His kingdom and teach the people the ways of salvation.”

After the Prophet Joseph Smith’s death, the Saints migrated to the American West, where they continued to establish stakes of Zion and build temples. In 1848 Church leaders urged converts in Europe to “emigrate as speedily as possible” to the Great Basin and to the city in the mountains. New members throughout the world—especially those in Great Britain and Scandinavia—eagerly followed Church leaders’ instructions, so much so that Latter-day Saint settlements faced challenges supporting and integrating the large numbers of immigrants economically.

Church leaders in the 1890s began encouraging new members to remain in their homelands. In 1894, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles decided that members far from Utah “should not be encouraged to emigrate until they are firmly grounded in the religion by labor and experience.

In 1952 President David O. McKay traveled to Europe to select sites for temples in England and Switzerland. While in Europe, he told a reporter, “We aim to keep our adherents here instead of encouraging them to immigrate to Utah and other places in the United States.” He explained that the presence of temples would bring the blessings of Zion to the Saints in Europe. Subsequent church Presidents continued to pursue the

goal of building temples wherever there were large concentrations of Saints. We all listen intently each conference as new Temples are announced and we rejoice that saints around the world can and will gather Israel in their Stakes in Zion. In the October 2006 General Conference, then Elder Russell M. Nelson said...: “The choice to come unto Christ is not a matter of physical location; it is a matter of individual commitment. People can be ‘brought to the knowledge of the Lord’ without leaving their homelands. True, in the early days of the Church, conversion often meant emigration as well. But now the gathering takes place in each nation. ... The place of gathering for Brazilian Saints is in Brazil; the place of gathering for Nigerian Saints is in Nigeria; the place of gathering for Korean Saints is in Korea; and so forth. Zion is ‘the pure in heart.’ [D&C 97:21.] Zion is wherever righteous Saints are. I went to the [ChurchofJesusChrist.org](http://ChurchofJesusChrist.org) Temple page and counted 245 dedicated, under construction or announced temples. How blessed we are to live in an age where temples are available to our Brother and Sisters. Elder Nelson went on to say in his 2006 conference address that ...”The physical gathering of Israel will not be complete until the Second Coming of the Savior and on into the Millennium. Then the Lord’s promise will be fulfilled:”

So how can you or I adopt the attribute of Christ of gathering Israel. If you are like me I wonder how can I make a difference, how can I gather Israel as the prophets old and new have testified. The answer lies in the words spoken by Elder Dieter F Uchtdorf in his April 2019 conference address titled Missionary work: Sharing what is in your heart. Elder Uchtdorf states If you feel that you have been dragging your feet when it comes to sharing the gospel message, may I suggest five guilt-free things anyone can do to participate in the Savior’s great commission to help gather Israel? He gives us 5 simple suggestions:

1. Draw close to God. – The first great commandment is to love God. Elder Uchtdorf tells us the closer you draw to our Heavenly Father, the more is light and joy will shine within us.

2. Fill your heart with love for others. – This is the second great commandment. Each of us is a child of heavenly parents. We have been given the gift of ministering as a high and holier way to be with our neighbors and friends. Elder Uchtdorf teaches us to laugh with them, rejoice with them, weep with them, respect them, heal, lift and strengthen them. Christ had compassion for all and so should we.
3. Strive to walk in the path of discipleship. - have a humble heart, be teachable and walk in the path of discipleship each day. We learn line upon line, little by little and that is ok. We keep trying, we keep loving even those that are different from us or those we have differing opinions.
4. Share what is in your heart. – we can be courageous, confident and still be humble. There are many ways to share your personal testimony. We are encouraged to humbly use social medial platforms. Last week I had the opportunity to hear President and Sister Innes of the 1<sup>st</sup> ward report on their time as Mission President of the Charleston South Carolina mission. President Innes shared many amazing stories from the missionaries using Facebook posts to share a message of love. We hear of missionaries all over the world facing COVID quarantine using the power of social media platforms to teach and share the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ
5. Trust the Lord to work His miracles. – it is not our job to convert people, that is the role of the Holy Ghost. Elder Uchtdorf teaches us our role is to share what is in your heart and live consistent with our beliefs.

This last suggestion is one that hits close to home. My father is very very Irish Catholic. He has attended mass nearly every Sunday of his life at the St Mary's parish in Park City. There have been many times where temple work especially proxy work for the dead has come up at family dinners. He has been consistent and true to his beliefs over the years, he has asked that we do not do his side of the families' temple work, then with a smile he says at least until I am dead. I have not had the faith to allow for miracles. I

have not done my paternal lines work. I need to listen to the words of Elder Uchtdorf stop dragging my feet.

The Gathering of Israel has been prophesied throughout history. We today can be part of the gathering. The word “We” includes primary children making baptismal covenants, “We” includes young men and young women by staying on the covenant path and “We” includes adults as we draw closer to God, fill our hearts with love, walk a path of discipleship, share what is in our heart and trusting in the Lord, even Jesus Christ.

2 Nephi 31: 20-21 reads:

“Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life. “And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end.”

Brothers and Sisters, I testify that God lives, I testify that Jesus Christ is our brother and our savior. I bear witness that the gospel of Christ is restored on earth today. I testify Joseph Smith is a prophet of God. I testify that the Book of Mormon is true. I love you, I know your Bishopric loves you and I know the Stake Presidency loves you. I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.