

“Return unto Me ... That I May Heal You”

By Elder S. Mark Palmer
Of the Presidency of the Seventy

“Foi Mai ia te A’u ... Ina Ia Ou Faamaloloina Outou”

Saunia e Elder S. Mark Palmer
O Le Au Peresitene o Fituafulu

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*There is rejoicing in heaven over those who return.
It is not too late for you to come back.*

We once lived in a home surrounded by majestic trees. Next to the entrance was a beautiful willow tree. One sad night a mighty storm blew, and the willow came crashing down. It lay on the ground with its roots pulled out and was a sorry sight.

I was ready to rev up the chainsaw and cut the tree up for firewood when our neighbour came running out to stop me. He chastised me for giving up on the tree, and he emphatically urged us not to get rid of it. He then pointed to one root still in the ground and said that if we propped the tree up, cut off its branches, and nourished it, the roots would take hold once again.

I was sceptical and doubted how a tree so obviously fallen and in trouble could possibly survive and come back to life. I reasoned that even if it did begin growing again, it would surely not survive the next storm. But knowing our neighbour believed the tree still had a future, we went along with the plan.

And the result? After some time, we saw signs of life as the tree began to take root. Now, 12 years later, the tree is vibrant and full of life, with strong roots, and once again contributing to the beauty of the landscape.

While I meet Saints around the world, I am reminded of this willow tree and how there is hope even when all seems lost. Some once had testimonies of the gospel that were strong and vibrant like the willow. Then, for uniquely personal reasons, those testimonies became weakened,

O loo i ai le olioli i le lagi ona o i latou o ē e toefoi mai. E le o tuai mo oe lou toefoi mai.

Sa i ai se taimi na matou nonofo ai i se fale e siosiomia e laau matagofie. I tafatafa o le āfega i totonu sa i ai se laau manaia o le uilo [willow]. I se tasi po faanoanoa, sa agi ai se matagi malosi, ma sa patatū ai i lalo le uilo. Na taatia i lalo ma ona āa ua lia'i ma o se vaaiga faanoanoa.

Sa ou sauni e faaola le 'iliafi ma tipitipi le laau e fai ai fafie, ae tamoe mai lo matou tuaoi e taofi au. Sa ia otegia a'u ona ua ou manatu ua pe le laau ma e le toe ola, ma sa ia uunaia ma le faatau-anau i matou e aua ne'i faatama'iaina le laau. Ona tusi lea o lona lima i le āa e tasi sa mau pea i le palapala ma fai mai, afai tatou te toe teuina le laau, tatipi ese ona lālā, fafaga, ona toe mamau lea o āa.

Sa ou le mautonu ma masalosalo pe faapefea e se laau ua iloa lelei ua pa'ū ma ua faaletonu, ona mafai ona toe ola. Sa ou faapea e oo foi pe a toe ola, e mautinoa lava e le sao mai i le isi afā. Ae i le iloa ai sa talitonu lo matou tuaoi o loo i ai pea se lumanai o le laau, sa matou tuu ai loa i lena tonu.

A o le ā la le taunuuga? Ina ua mavae sina taimi, sa matou vaaia ni faailoga o le ola ina ua amata ona toe ola āa o le laau. Ia, e 12 tausaga mulimuli ane, sa olaola le laau ma lauusi ma āa ua malolosi, ma sa toe saofagā i le matagofie o le laufanua.

A o ou feiloai ai ma le Au Paia i le salafa o le lalolagi, ou te manatua ai lenei laau o le uilo ma le ala o loo i ai le faamoemoe e ui lava ua foliga ua leai se mea o totoe. E i ai nisi sa i ai molimau malolosi ma uluuluola o le talalelei e faapei o le uilo. Ona oo lea, ona o mafuaaga tulagaese pati-

leading to a loss of faith. Others hang on with the slimmest of roots tapping into gospel soil.

Yet again and again, I am inspired by the stories of so many who have chosen to renew their discipleship and come back to their Church home. Rather than discarding their faith and belief like worthless firewood, instead they have responded to spiritual promptings and loving invitations to return.

I attended a stake conference in Korea where a returning member shared: “I thank the brothers for their willingness to accept my lack of faith and my weakness, for reaching out to me, and for the members who are always so kind to me. I still have a lot of friends around me who are less active. It’s funny, but they tell each other to go back to the Church to get their faith back. I think maybe they are all longing for faith.”

To all who are longing for faith, we invite you to come back. I promise your faith can be strengthened as you once again worship with the Saints.

A former missionary from Africa wrote a senior Church leader, apologising and seeking forgiveness for being offended by his teachings about a certain cultural tradition, which then led him to leave the Church. He humbly expressed: “Sadly, the fact that I took offense 15 years ago has made me pay an extremely heavy price. I lost so much—much more than I ever imagined. I am deeply embarrassed by the harm I may have caused along the way, but above all else I am pleased that I have found my way back.”

To all who recognise what you have lost, we invite you to come back so you can once again taste the joyous fruit of the gospel.

A sister in the United States was gone from the Church for many years. Her story of coming back includes powerful lessons for parents and family members who anguish over loved ones who step away. She wrote:

“I could list a myriad of reasons for why I walked away from the Church, the gospel, and in a way, my family. But they really don’t matter. I didn’t make one big decision to leave the Church—I probably made a thousand choices.

no, na faavaivaia na molimau, ma tau atu ai ina le toe i ai se faatuatua. O isi o loo tauivi i a latou molimau ae o loo lagolagoina pea i latou i aoaoga o le talalelei.

Ae e musuia pea lava pea a’u i tala a le toatele ua filifili e faafouina lo latou avea ai ma soo ma toefoi mai i le aiga o la latou Ekalesia. Nai lo le la-foa’ia o lo latou faatuatua ma le talitonuga e pei o fafie ua leai se aoga, ae ua latou tali atu i uunaiga faaleagaga ma fiafia i valaaulia e toefoi mai.

Sa ou auai i se konafesi faalesiteki i Korea na faasoa ai e se tagata o le ekalesia ua toefoi mai: “Ou te faafetai i uso i lo latou naunautaiga e talia le leai o so’u faatuatua ma o’u vaivaiga, mo le aapa mai ia te au, ma i tagata o le ekalesia e agalelei i taimi uma ia te au. O loo tele pea a’u uo o loo si-omia ai au ae ua le o toaaga mai. E malie, ae latou te fai atu i le tasi ma le isi e toefoi i le Lotu ia toe maua mai lo latou faatuatua. Ou te manatu atonu o i latou uma o loomoomoo mo le faatuatua.”

Ia i latou uma atonu o loo moomoo mo le faatuatua, matou te valaaulia outou e foi mai. Ou te folafola atu e mafai ona faamalolosia lo outou faatuatua pe a outou toe tapuai faatasi ma le Au Paia.

Na tusi atu se tasi na avea ma faifeautalai mai Aferika i se taitai sinia o le Ekalesia, e faatoese ma sailia le faamagaloga ona o lona tiga i ana aoaoga e uiga i se tu faaleaganuu patino, lea na mafua ai ona ia tuua le Ekalesia. Sa ia faaalua ma le lotomauualalo: “E faanoanoa, ona o le mea moni sa ou tiga i le 15 tausaga ua mavae, na ou oo ai i se taunuuga ogaoga. Ua tele na’ua mea ua ou le maua—tele na’ua nai lo se mea na ou mafaufai-ina. Ua ou matua’i maasiasi lava i le manu’a atonu na ou matua’ia i le ala, ae o le mea aupito taua i lo mea uma ua ou fiafia ona ua ou toe foi mai.”

Ia i latou uma ua iloa mea ua e le maua, matou te valaaulia outou e toefoi mai ina ia mafai ai ona outou toe tofo i le matagofie o fua o le talalelei.

Sa i ai se tuafafine i le Iunaite Setete na tele tausaga o ia tuua le Ekalesia. O lana tala o lona toefoi mai e aofia ai lesona mamana mo matua ma tagata o le aiga, o ē tiga ona o ē pele ua tuua le Ekalesia. Na ia tusia:

“E mafai ona ou lisiina se anoanoa o ma-fuaaga eseese pe aisea na ou tuua ai le Ekalesia, le talalelei, ma i se tasi itu, o lo’u aiga. Ae e matua’i lē afaina lava. Ou te le’i faia se tonu telē e tasi e tuua le Ekalesia—atonu ai na ou faia ni filifiliga

But one thing I have always known is that my parents did make one big decision, and they stuck to it. They decided to love me.

“I couldn’t possibly know how many tears have been shed, how many sleepless nights, nor how many heartfelt pleading words of prayer have been uttered on my behalf. They didn’t call me out on my sins; rather, they called out to me in my sinfulness. They didn’t make me feel unwelcome in their home and at family gatherings; any of those feelings were of my own doing. Instead, they continued to welcome me. They must have seen my light dim over time. But they knew that the person I was back then was just a shadow of who I was yet to become.

“Just as my path away from the Church was complex, so was my way back. But one thing that was not hard about coming back was the feeling of being back home where I belong.”

My message today is especially to all who once felt the Spirit but question whether there is a way back or a place for you in the restored Church of Jesus Christ. It is also for any who are barely hanging on or who are tempted to step away.

This message is not a challenge, and it is not a condemnation. It is an invitation, extended with love and a sincere desire to welcome you back to your spiritual home.

I have prayed that you will feel the witness of the Holy Ghost as you now hear this loving invitation and magnificent promise from our Saviour, Jesus Christ:

“Will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you?”

Every week many are responding to the Saviour’s invitation by returning to discipleship and Church activity, quietly and humbly seeking the healing that Jesus promises. And contrary to narratives which sometimes circulate, record numbers of our young people are choosing to stay strong and to grow their faith in Jesus Christ.

When some of Jesus’s followers in Capernaum found His teachings hard and chose to leave, He turned to His Apostles and asked, “Will ye also go away?”

This is the question we each must answer as

se afe. Ae o le mea e tasi na ou iloa i taimi uma, na faia e o’u matua se faaiuga tele e tasi, ma o la lava e taasisi i ai. Sa tonu ia i la’ua e alolofa ia te au.

“E le mafai ona ou iloa pe o le a le tele o o la loimata na maligi, pe fia po sa le’i mafai ai ona momoe, pe fia foi ni upu o tatalo faatauana mai o la loto na faia mo au. La te le’i faitioina a’u i a’u agasala; ae, aapa mai pea ma le alofa e fesoasoani mai tusa pe ou te agasala La te le’i faia lava ia ou lagona se lē talileleia i lo la fale ma i tauaofiaga faaleaiga; soo se lagona faapena, o a’u lava ia. Ae, sa la talileleia pea au e le aunoa. Atonu na la vaaia le faifaimalie o le muiiti o la’u sulu. Ae sa la iloina o le tagata sa ou i ai i lena taimi, sa na o se atalafoia o le tagata o le a avea ai a’u.

“E faapei foi ona lavelave lo’u ala na ou alu ese ai mai le Ekalesia, sa faapena foi lo’u ala e toefoi ai. Ae o le mea e tasi sa le’i faigata i le toefoi mai, o le lagona o le toefoi i le aiga i le mea e ā a’u.

O la’u savali i le asō e faapitoa lava mo i latou uma sa lagonaina i se taimi le Agaga ae ua tuufesili pe i ai se ala e toefoi ai, po o se avanoa mo oe i le Ekalesia toefuatai a Iesu Keriso. E mo soo se tasi foi o tau le mau le molimau pe ua faaosoosoina foi e la’a ese.

O lenei savali e le o se lu’i, ma e lē o se ta’us-alaga foi. O se valaaulia, e tuuina atu ma le alofa ma se naunauga faamaoni e toe talileleia oe i lou aiga faaleagaga.

Na ou tatalo ia outou lagonaina le molimau a le Agaga Paia, a o e faalogoina i le taimi nei lenei valaaulia alofa ma le folafolaga ofoofogia mai lo tatou Faaola, o Iesu Keriso:

“Pe tou te le foi mai nei ea ia te au, ma salamo ia outou agasala, ma liua, ina ia ou faamaloloina outou?”

O vaiaso uma lava e toatele o loo tali atu i le valaaulia a le Faaola e ala i le toefoi e avea ma soo ma toe malolosi i le Ekalesia, ma sailia lemu ma le lotomaulalo le faamalologa ua folafola mai e Iesu. Ma e ese ai mai faamatalaga e salalau i nisi o taimi, e fuainumera silia le aofai faamaumauina o o tatou tagata talavou ua filifili e tumau le malolosi ma tuputupuāe i lo latou faatuatua ia Iesu Keriso.

Ina ua iloa e nisi o soo o Iesu i Kapanaumi e faigata Ana aoaoga ma filifili e tuua, sa ia faliu atu i Ana Aposetolo ma fesili, “Pe tou te fia o ese foi?”

O le fesili lea e tataua ona tofua fesili ai i tatou

we face our individual times of testing. Peter's response to Jesus is timeless and resounding: "To whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."

So as you consider the Saviour's invitation to return unto Him, what might you learn from the story of the willow tree?

The journey back is often not easy or comfortable, but it is worth it. When our willow was stood back up, all its branches were cut away. It was not pretty. We too may feel vulnerable as we discard old ways and are stripped of pride. Focusing your faith on Jesus Christ and His gospel—the trunk and the roots—will give you the hope and the courage to take that first step back.

It took many years for our willow to regain its former strength and beauty. Now it is even stronger and more beautiful than before. Be patient as your faith and testimony also grow. This includes not taking offense at thoughtless comments like "Where have you been all these years?"

The willow would never have survived without constant care and nourishment. You will nourish your faith and your testimony as you feast at the sacrament table each week and as you worship in the house of the Lord.

Just as the willow needed sunshine for its branches and leaves to grow again, so your testimony will grow as you stay sensitive to the feelings and the witness of the Spirit. Learn from Amulek, who described his time as a less-active member by saying, "I was called many times and I would not hear."

My neighbour knew what the willow could once again become. So too the Lord knows your divine potential and what your faith and your testimony can become. He will never give up on you. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, all that is broken can be healed.

I witness that there is rejoicing in heaven over those who return. You are needed, and you are loved. I testify that Jesus Christ is our Saviour and that He blesses all who return unto Him with greater peace and with great joy. His arms of mercy are not folded but are open and extended to you. It is not too late for you to come back. With all the love in our hearts, we welcome you home. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

a o tatou feagai ma taimi taitasi o le tofotofoina. O le tali a Peteru ia Iesu e taua ma e mautu: "A matou o ea ia te ai? o ia te oe upu o le ola e faavavau."

A o e mafaufau la i le valaaulia a le Faaola e toefoi atu ia te Ia, o le a se mea e te ono aoaoina mai le tala i le laau o le uilo?

O le malaga toefoi e tele ina lē faigofie pe lē lagolelei, ae e aoga. Ina ua toe tu lelei le matou uilo, sa sala ese uma ona lālā. Sa le'i manaia. O i tatou foi e ono lagona le vaivai a o tatou lafoaia ala tuai ma tuu ese le faamaualuga. O le tau-lai atu o lou faatuatua ia Iesu Keriso ma Lana talalelei—o le ogalaau ma a'a—o le a e maua ai le faamoemoe ma le lototele e fai ai lena la'a mua-mua e toefoi ai.

E tele tausaga na faatoa toe maua ai e la matou uilo lona malosi ma le matagofie sa i ai. O le taimi nei ua malosi atu ma sili atu ona matagofie nai lo le taimi muamua. Ia onosai aua o le a tupu-tupua'e foi lou faatuatua ma lau molimau. E aofia ai i lenei mea lou le ita i faamatalaga lē mafaufau e pei o le "O fea na e i ai i nei tausaga uma?"

Semanu e le toe ola le uilo e aunoa ma le tausiga ma le fagagaina faifai pea. O le a e fagagaina lou faatuatua ma lau molimau a o e taumafa i le la'o'ai o le faamanatuga i vaiaso taitasi ma a o e tapuai i le maota o le Alii.

E faapei foi ona manaomia e le uilo le lasu-sulu mo ona lala ma lau e toe ola ai, e faapena foi ona ola lau molimau a o tumau lou gauai atu i lagona ma le molimau a le Agaga. Aoao mai ia Amuleka, o lē na faamatalaina lona taimi o se tagata auai ua lē o toe toaga i le fai mai "sa valaauina a'u i le tele o taimi ae sa ou le fia faalogo."

Sa iloa e lo'u tuaoi le mea e mafai ona toe o'o i ai le uilo. E faapena foi ona silafia e le Alii lou gafatia paia ma le mea e mafai ona o'o i ai lou faatuatua ma lau molimau. O le a lē fiu lava o Ia ia te oe. E ala i le Togiola a Iesu Keriso, o i latou uma ua nutililii, e mafai ona faamaloloina.

Ou te molimau atu o loo i ai le olioli i le lagi ona o i latou o ē e toefoi mai. E manaomia outou, ma e alofaina outou. Ou te molimau atu o Iesu Keriso o lo tatou Faaola ma e faamanuiaina e Ia tagata uma o e toefoi mai ia te Ia ma le filemu ma le olioli sili atu. E le o piilima Ona aao o le alo-famutimutivale ae o loo tatala ma faaloaloa mai ia te outou. E le o tuai tele mo oe lou toefoi mai. Faatasi ai ma le alofa uma i o matou loto, matou te talileleia oe i le aiga. I le suafa o Iesu Keriso, amene.