

## *Grace & Motivation*

Brad Wilcox  
Session 1

Hi, I'm Brad Wilcox. I teach at Brigham Young University. I've taught in the education department for many, many, many years and this last year I switched over to teaching religious education. And now I'm teaching Book of Mormon and New Testament full time in the Department of Ancient Scripture and I've just loved it. It's been a great change for me, a good change of pace and a nice new focus in my life. I'd always taught religion, but I'd always done it kind of on the side at BYU, and finally now that's the focus that I have full time.

### **What are some leadership experiences you have had in the Church?**

I think everybody in the church has leadership experiences, because we're all called into callings that we are not sure exactly how we're gonna handle.

I have served as a bishop and served in a stake presidency. It was a wonderful opportunity that my wife and I had, to preside over the Chile Santiago East Mission, and that was from 2003 to 2006. While we were there, Elder Holland was directing the work for the very first year of our mission, and it was wonderful to be able to watch him up-close and see what an effective and what a Christ-like leader he is. But right now, my wife and I are serving in the cub scouts, and that takes leadership too.

### **Why did you start writing your well-known book *The Continuous Atonement*?**

Well, actually, that does tie into church leadership, because that book started when I was serving as a bishop in a young single adult ward. And I kept noticing that the young people were kind of falling into a pattern. They'd come, they'd confess, they'd feel better, then they'd go out and mess up again. Then they'd come, they'd confess, they'd feel better, and then they'd go mess up again. And as I watched this pattern happen, I realized that it kind of got to a point at which they just gave up.

Some of them gave up emotionally. They would come to meetings, but you could just tell that they're hearts were no longer in it. And some of them just gave up completely, they just stopped coming. And I started thinking, how on earth am I going to reach these young people and teach them that the blessing of the atonement are not a one-shot deal that we confess, we forsake and then

we never, ever sin again, rather that the blessings of the atonement are there throughout that process and that that process of making changes, that God and Christ are aware, that that takes time, and that bad habits are not broken overnight. And I just kept feeling so strongly the need to reach these young people and try to help them understand the continuous nature of the atonement of Jesus Christ and that he's help is not waiting for us at the end of our change process, but rather it is available to us right here and now, as we are going through that change process.

The book grew out of a need, a need that I sensed as a young leader, a need that I sensed as a bishop. And I kept feeling like it's not that the doctrine's not there, or that the doctrine is new, it's that we need to teach it in a way that will motivate young people and give them hope, as they're going through this growing, changing process that we all go through in life. So the book actually grew out of a need that I felt as a bishop.

**Once those you counseled understood the continuous Atonement of Jesus Christ, how did that change their motivation?**

Well, I think that so many of them just felt like you have to repent and you have to forsake, and that if you don't forsake, it means you haven't repented. And I think the shift that started helping them feel like there was hope for them, was just recognizing that forsaking is a process. Yes, of course we have to forsake, but that's not always an immediate thing and it's not always a once and for all thing. It can be a process, and that Jesus is willing to give us his help throughout the process. He's not up there saying, "Oh gosh, if you could just get your act together, then you could come to me." He's willing to come to us.

We talk a lot in the church about come unto Christ, but we don't talk often enough about how Christ comes to us, and that the ultimate goal of this engagement with Christ is not just to come unto Christ, that becomes the means to the end. The ultimate end is to become like Christ. And I think once we take our minds off of the idea of qualifying to be in Christ presence, to the idea of becoming more Christ-like, then it shifts out motives, it shifts our focus, it shifts our level of hope.

One girl wrote me an email and she said, "Why not have sex with my boyfriend? Why not?" She said, "We can always repent later." And I wrote her back and I said, "You certainly can, and I'm glad you recognize that. I'm glad you realize that you can be forgiven and you can be completely forgiven. But cleanliness is only one of God's many attributes. And the time you're spending spinning wheels, is time that could be spent developing the many, many attributes that we need to develop as we strive to become like God."

And I think as young people start recognizing that the atonement was performed not just to be able to cleanse us from our sins, but also to be able to make us better, to be able to ultimately make us more like God and more like Jesus Christ. Then all of a sudden, they see the experiences and the choices of their lives differently.

### **How do expectations and timing play into the continuous Atonement of Jesus Christ?**

Yes. I got an email from a kid in the MTC and he says, "Where's God? Why has God abandoned me?" And I wrote him back, and I'm like, "What are you talking about? God lives at the MTC. What are you talking about?" He says, "I have been here for three weeks and I still don't speak Spanish." And I wrote him back and I said, "Reality check. Look how long it took you to learn English as a baby. You don't learn Spanish overnight." He writes back and he says, "Don't we believe in the gift of tongues?" I said, "Of course we do," and sometimes in church history that's been instantaneous, but usually God uses a more natural learning process, not because his grace isn't present and not because his power and his miracles are not obvious, it's that his purpose is different.

He doesn't want that missionary to just have a few phrases that he can spit out and fake like he knows Spanish. He doesn't want that missionary to just get through a vacation, get through a couple days and know how to order a meal and go to the bathroom. He wants that missionary to be able to answer heart-felt questions, and he wants that missionary to be able to teach and testify in Spanish. That means it has to be part of him.

See, if the change is only cosmetic, then we can all get through for a day or two. But if the change has to go deep into our heart, then it's a different story, it takes time. Time is the medium through which the power of the atonement is made manifest in our lives. And once we recognize that time is part of the process, then we start understanding that it's not that God isn't helping us because God isn't up there like Harry Potter going, "Poof, poof, poof. Now you speak Español. Poof." Suddenly we realize that God is helping, but he's using a natural process of time, because he doesn't just want the change to be short term. Change without challenge isn't change. And strength too easily won is not strength.

God helps us through this long term process, to make sure that the changes are internalized. And that's important for us to remember, because we can all get frustrated when we think, "Oh, I've got so far to go." But sometimes we need to look back and say, "Well, I've come quite a distance with the help of God." And we don't always see his help, because we expect it to be quick. "Help me lose weight," and then we expect to wake up tomorrow and weigh our ideal weight.

"Oh, please help me break my bad habit," and then we expect to never feel tempted again. No, that would go against the whole purpose of mortality, so we just have to trust that time is not the enemy, time is a tool that God is using as he helps us make positive changes. And as those changes go inside, enduring to the end does not mean enduring without errors. Enduring to the end means enduring despite errors. Enduring in the covenant we have made with God, despite mistakes, despite errors. And that's what's going to get us there.

### **What would you say to a leader that is discouraged that change isn't happening fast enough?**

Because see, we're looking at the home teaching, instead of the home teachers. And that's the problem, is that we want a number to change. I mean, when my brother and I were serving together in Elders Quorum presidency and we were very young, we just thought, "Well, if these fools aren't gonna go out and do their home teaching, we'll go do it for them." And we had great numbers. I mean, we could throw great numbers at the stake, because my brother and I were home teaching the whole stinking ward, but that's not the ultimate goal.

Remember, see, the ultimate goal isn't just to have the right number, or to have the right answer. The goal is to help make sure that the whole principle of home teaching is internalized. It's not that, okay, if we get a certain number, then we get into Heaven. Oh, great, then we'll get that number, we'll get into Heaven, and then we find out the Heaven is eternal home teaching. What? I didn't want to do home teaching the rest of eternity. I thought if I just did this thing that I didn't want to do, then I would get what I wanted to get. Like Heaven's some big vacation.

We don't understand that service is not something we do to get to Heaven. Service is the environment in Heaven. And testimony isn't something that we gain, so that we can get through the door. Testimony is the environment of Heaven, testimony is the language of Heaven. So why do we even want to go to Heaven, if we haven't internalized the principles that will make us feel comfortable there? My suggestion has always been, whenever I'm working in situations like home teaching, is just taking an interest in people, rather than focusing on the numbers.

Sitting down with a home teacher takes time, a lot more time than calling on the phone and getting the stats. But as you sit down with the home teacher, and you show interest and concern about his progress, as well as whether he has done his visits, then I think we're moving in the right direction.

Same thing with mission presidents. You can beat the drum and you can say, "Baptisms, baptisms, baptisms. Where is your faith? If you had more faith, we'd have more baptisms." I mean, you can play that game, but ultimately I think you

need to just show more concern with the missionaries. As you truly show that you care about the progress of the missionaries, then the numbers start taking care of themselves. The numbers come, but you have to take your focus off of the numbers, so that you're focusing on people and showing the concern there.

One thing I swore I would never do as a mission president, was speak at the stake conferences about member missionary work. I never did. And I'm sure some people thought I was a lousy mission president, because I wasn't up there screaming to the members about how they need to give referrals to the missionaries. I just figured, if the members could be nourished spiritually, if I could give a talk that could help them understand the truths that we have in the Gospel that bless our lives, that other people don't have, then the referrals, the desire to share, to engage in missionary work, comes as a consequence of the change in perspective, the increase of testimony that people feel.

It's not a quick fix, but we've been talking about time, and it takes time. You can motivate somebody with a ra ra, "If we get enough numbers we'll give you all a candy bar." And you can motivate someone with fear, "If you don't get enough numbers, then by hand we're gonna publish all the missionaries who didn't baptize in the ward." I mean, you can play those games, but fear, reward, even duty are very short term motivations.

Ultimately, we have to focus on the long term motivations, and those long terms ... you're listening to my wife's dogs. You're focusing on the long term motivations and that has to be love. Love for the work, love for the Lord and love from the leader to those he's leading, and love from those he's leading to him, or to her.

### **What lesson is behind the phrase, "A leader is a coach, not a critic?"**

That phrase is one that I actually have in my head, because of Elder Bruce C. Hafen. When I was serving in a stake presidency of a YSA stake, Elder Hafen came to our stake conference, and as we interacted with him over the course of the weekend, we had a meeting with the bishops and with Elder Hafen. They had the chance to learn from him, but they also had the chance to ask questions. And in a YSA stake, you can imagine that a lot of the questions had to do with some of the struggles that young people have with pornography and such.

So, all these bishops are trying to pin Elder Hafen to the wall, "How long should it be before a young man can have a temporal recommend, if he's viewed pornography?" And Elder Hafen would answer it, and then they'd say, "Yes, but you didn't answer the question. How long? Should be one week, two weeks, three weeks, three months? How long should it be since the last time you

viewed, before he can have a temporal recommend, or an endorsement to go to BYU, or a mission call?" And Elder Hafen would remind them that there's no time limit in the handbook and then he'd go on to teach about principles. And then some bishop would raise his hand and say, "Yes, but Elder Hafen, you didn't answer the question. How long ..."

And finally Elder Hafen, a little exasperated, looked at these bishops and said, "When a young man, or a young woman is struggling, he needs a coach not a critic. She needs a coach, not a critic." And that phrase really penetrated my heart, because I thought that's the answer. It's not how long, all right grit your teeth, white-knuckle it for two more weeks and then ... No. It's coaching through that entire process, not just looking at the outcome, but looking at the desires of the heart, looking at the repentant attitude. For one person, three months might not even be enough for him to be going in the right direction, but for another person, three days might be enough for him or her to be going in the right direction.

And I thought it was so wise of Elder Hafen to steer away from, "Okay, here is the line," and to talk more about helping someone get to the line. I've seen the same thing when parents continually ask me, since they know I work with the youth, they continually ask me, "Well, how do I get my kid to cut his hair? How do I get my daughter to take out her nose ring? How do I get my kid to ..." and I do the same thing Elder Hafen did. I just say, "Look, let's focus a little less on the hair and a little less on the nose ring, and a little more on what's inside." Because as that kid feels closer to God, as that kid starts having spiritual experiences in his life, all the hair will take care of itself, he'll take care of the hair, she'll take care of the nose ring. Good grief.

Some young women president came to me and she said, "The girls are coming to the dance and they have their dresses higher than one inch above the knee." I mean, yes, you can stand there at the dance, and you can have a ruler and you can measure everybody's skirt, and they pull their skirts down and then the minute they go in then they pull their skirts up. I mean, we can play that game. And I know that there's certain standards that have to be maintained to create the right environment, but again, it's a matter of where we're focusing. If young people think modesty is all about measurements, that's not the point.

**With your background in elementary education, what can you teach us about motivating children?**

Well, as a teacher you learn very quickly that you have to ask yourself a question: Could these kids do what I'm asking them to do if their lives depended on it? And then that lets you know your job. If the answer's "No, they could not do long division if they're lives depended on it," then my job is instruction. And if the answer is "Yes, they could do it if their lives depended on it," then my role

is motivation. And good teachers, good leaders, have to continually decide where they need to put their attention. Is it more on instruction, or is it more on motivation? Could this person do his home teaching if his life depended on it? Well, if the answer is "Yes, of course, he knows exactly what home teaching is," then maybe it's not so much instruction that he needs, but it is motivation. And motivation comes in levels.

Even in the church, Elder Oaks has given a wonderful talk on this, in which he talks about how sometimes we can work out of perceived requirements, "We have to do this," "I have to go move this family that's moving out of the ward. I have to go do this." Why do we feel like we have to do that? Well, maybe it's because we're afraid of some negative consequence, or because we're seeking some sort of positive thing. I mean, think about it. When you're talking to a kid about cleaning his room, you can punish him, "If this room isn't clean then you're not going anywhere this weekend," or you can say, "Hey, if you clean your room I'll give you a candy bar." But again, those motivations are short term.

Now, sometimes even working on a level of perceived responsibility, "I should do this," that can also be short term. But sometimes you have to start there to be able to move up through those levels to something higher. When I'm working with children, sometimes you have to start with, "Okay, we're gonna earn up little points to go to this," or, "We're gonna earn up little time," and as much time as we earn up, then that's going to equal some stickers or whatever.

So sometimes you have to start there, but it's certainly not where you want to end. It might be a place to start, but then the beauty of motivation is that it can change. Especially with our knowledge of Jesus Christ, we understand that he can change our motives, he can elevate our motives. What starts out as a desire for a reward, a fear of punishment, or a sharp sense of duty, can actually end as, "I'm doing this because I love it."

It happens with missionaries all the time. There aren't a lot of missionaries sitting in the MTC who are there because they just absolutely love it. They just love wearing a tie every day, and they love listening to Tabernacle Choir, and they just love going out and greeting strangers. See, not many start there. They're usually there because grandpa promised them a car if they serve their mission, or because they're afraid of the embarrassment in our culture if they don't go, or they feel a sense of duty, "Gosh, mom would be so disappointed if I don't go. And my bishop would be so disappointed and I don't want to hurt their feelings." But what starts there, pretty quickly moves. And then they start understanding the reasons why they're doing what they're doing, and then they start loving what they're doing.

I guess, a good thing to think about as you're thinking about motivation, is to think, "Okay, what is it that I love to do? That I do just because I love it? It becomes its own reward, and I'm just in that cycle of loving what I do and doing what I love, and loving what I do and doing what I love." For my dad, that was family history. He was there. For me, somebody have to make me a lemon meringue pie to get me to do some of the things my dad was doing.

And then think, how did I get there? Because as a kid maybe you didn't grow up loving classical music, maybe you didn't grow up loving general conference. For a lot of people that's quite a stretch, to be listening to session, after session, of all this talks, and yet for me, I love that. I live for it. How did I get there? Did I start that way as a kid? And if I look back, I have to start thinking, it came not from just gritting my teeth and doing something until I was used to it, but it came from seeing something greater, seeing a bigger picture. And if I can see that this is a means to a greater end, then all of a sudden, it feels as need in my life.

For me, general conference helps me feel closer to God and that's what keeps me doing it. For somebody, maybe classical music makes them feel cultured, or makes them feel peaceful. That's what keeps them doing it. So it's not just a matter of doing something out of habit, but it's a matter of starting to recognize that by doing something, your perspective is changing. And that's what I think helps people lift themselves, and let God lift them through those levels of motivation.

Think about the temple. What begins as obedience and sacrifice, ultimately turns into consecration. With some, we need to just start with obedience. You obey because you need to obey, you obey because that's what we do in our home. But that can't stop there. We have to keep lifting and keep striving, so that what begins with obedience can end as consecration.

**How can leaders help those he or she leads to find the enjoyment for activities that are not very enjoyable?**

Help them see the bigger picture. That's what the temple does for us. Why did the saints have to finish the Nauvoo Temple, when they knew they were gonna be leaving it? Why did they put funds toward completing a building that they were walking away from, when they could've put the funds toward wagons and horses and supplies? Because God needed to give them the bigger picture. He needed to help them see in a bigger perspective, because that was what was gonna get them through the journey that was ahead of them. That's what was gonna get them through when they were in the middle of the continents saying, "Why the heck are we doing this?"

I think that's the bigger picture that the plan of salvation gives all of us. God and Jesus didn't come to Joseph Smith to restore rules. They didn't come to Joseph and say, "Ha ha ha, you thought there were only 10 Commandments. No, there's more, there's more, there's more." No. The 10 Commandments actually made it through the apostasy. People still knew about them. What had been lost was the reason, the reason to live those commandments. And that's what God and Jesus came to restore to Joseph Smith, the plan of redemption. And within that plan of redemption, then suddenly we see the reasons why these things need to be done, and why these things need to happen.

Whenever young people are struggling with rules, or whenever people are struggling with expectations of the church, the answer is always to try to lift the perspective, and help them feel a sense of mission through giving them a larger perspective. The "Why," rather than just the "What," or the "How." But the "Why," the "Why" for others, the "Why" for themselves and all of those reasons can be found within the plan of redemption and that's why I believe, Alma said, "We gave them the 10 Commandments, God gave them the 10 Commandments," after having made known unto them the plan of redemption. Because without the plan of redemption, without the bigger picture, then all the commandments start seeming like, "Whoops," that you have to jump.

Elder Maxwell was once asked what kept him motivated. Why was he motivated to live the love chastity? Why was he motivated to work and serve in the church? And his answer was, "A sense of mission." And I think when we can give people that sense of mission, when they can see that what they're doing matters in their lives, in the lives of others, and matters now and eternally, then the motivation is lifted from rewards and punishments and rules, to love.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS**

Well, if I follow my own rule, if I say here, "All right, let's think reasons and not just these rules," if I'm trying to broaden that perspective, then I would say, "Remember what this is teaching you." This calling to lead is not just about the people you're leading, it's about you. I think God calls Relief Society presidents so that they'll do their visiting teaching the rest of their lives. And I think God calls Elders Quorum presidents so that they will do their home teaching the rest of their lives. Because suddenly their perspective has changed and they realize the importance of this.

I think God calls missionaries so that they can go out and work with members, so that they will commit to be better members the rest of their lives. They'll say, "I'm not gonna be that member that wouldn't help. I'm not gonna be the member that wouldn't greet people in the chapel. I'm not gonna be the member

who wouldn't give referrals." So they come home motivated to be better members, because of their experience in a leadership role. Remember, what we're doing is worth it. What we're doing matters and it's not just that it matters for everybody out there, but it matters for us, and it matters for our futures.

Randall Wright is an amazing teacher that I admire. He's from Texas. And I was with him one time with some youth, and he said, "How many think Ammon and Aaron were great missionaries?" All the hands went up. "How many people do you think they converted?" And oh my gosh, the numbers these kids were throwing out were just amazing. "Thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands." And they were throwing out all these big numbers and Randall just had a smile on his face and he said, "Read the Book of Mormon one more time." He says, "If you really pay close attention, Ammon and Aaron, they only really converted one person each, those kings. But then, through the kings, then the kings converted their households, their families, their communities." And boy those teenagers just went, "What?" Because in their minds, success was all about numbers, but in God's mind, the numbers take care of themselves.

Success was about bringing Ammon and Aaron to a knowledge of their potential. And Ammon and Aaron's success was measured by bringing two kings to the knowledge of their potential. And as each one received a bigger picture, then more, and more, and more people were affected. So sometimes it's just about you. And sometimes it's just about one person. And then others will also be affected.

Elder Bednar spoke at a Desert Book dinner one time, and someone asked him what was his most profound insight after having been called to the Quorum of the Twelve. And he said, "That's about the one." He said, "Everybody looks at us as members of the Quorum and thinks that we're out teaching to thousands." And he said, "We do, but it's all about the one person." He says, "I go to a stake conference and I always know that there's one person there that I was sent for." He says, "I go to a mission and I know there's one missionary that I was sent for." He says, "If I can focus in on the one, then the others come along for the ride." And I thought that was just a beautiful reminder as to what we really are about as parents, what we're really about as teachers, and what we're really about as leaders in our professions and in the church.

God works with us individually. Every ordinance is performed individually. He doesn't work with us as a mass, as a group, although groups are important. God works with groups through individuals. And if we can keep that perspective, that focus, then I think we're starting to learn to lead, and to lift, and to love the way the Lord does.

