Elder Dallin H. Oaks: Elder Nielson, would you please introduce the first item on our agenda?

Elder Brent H. Nielson: Thank you, Elder Oaks. Last January we met in a broadcast with all the full-time missionaries, and the training was so excellent that we thought maybe we would review a little bit of the training we did last year. Believe it or not, half the missionaries who are serving today weren't present during that training. And so, with your permission, we would like to first look at an excerpt of a talk that you gave and discuss with the council some of the things that you taught us last year.

[Video excerpt from 2016 Worldwide Missionary Broadcast begins]

Elder Dallin H. Oaks: Now that we're past the large expenditures of time necessary to adjust—adjust to big variations in the numbers of missionaries, especially sister missionaries—we can now teach and improve focus on the doctrinal purpose of missionary work, which is to teach repentance and baptize converts to the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is what our Savior commanded us to do: "Teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19). Later the Savior repeated His doctrine in these words: "Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that [if ye then endure to the end,] . . . ye may stand spotless before me at the last day" (3 Nephi 27:20). And thus we see that the doctrine of Christ is that we must repent and be baptized and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost and endure to the end in order to be saved in the celestial kingdom of God. Missionaries are called to teach that doctrine.

[Video ends]

Elder Brent H. Nielson: Elder Oaks, missionaries often talk about the doctrine of Christ, and I wonder if it would be important for us to discuss if a missionary really understands the doctrine of Christ. How can they know that?

Elder Dallin H. Oaks: Surely a first step is for them to keep in mind the sequence of repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost.
**Elder David A. Bednar:** I think one of the things that would be an indication of knowing the doctrine of Christ is focusing on the basics. The Prophet Joseph Smith said that the more we learn about faith in Christ, the more we will focus on faith in Christ. So there are a number of topics that might be at the periphery that would be removed from our focus if we are really beginning to understand the doctrine of Christ.

**Elder Neil L. Andersen:** I think—don’t you think as well?—that while living the gospel is not that easy, understanding the gospel is not that difficult. And sometimes as a young missionary you wonder, “Do I know enough? Can I teach it?” But in effect, if you remember your purpose, you talk about faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, enduring to the end. You have the major elements and you build around those.

**Elder Brent H. Nielson:** And it’s simple enough for anyone to understand.

**Elder Neil L. Andersen:** Right. We constantly emphasize 2 Nephi 31, 3 Nephi 11, and 3 Nephi 27. You can read those in about 30 minutes and you have most of what you need to understand, although it takes a lot of spiritual power to understand them fully.

**Elder Dallin H. Oaks:** Missionaries, remember, don’t skip any steps.

**Bishop W. Christopher Waddell:** I think another indication of whether a missionary understands the doctrine of Christ will show up in the missionaries themselves—how they behave. If a missionary really understands the importance of the doctrine of Christ and what it signifies, they’re going to act differently. They’re going to be more obedient, they’re going to develop a better relationship with their companions, they’re going to seek the Spirit more fervently. They’re really going to demonstrate it in their behavior because they understand what it means to everyone around them.

**Elder Dallin H. Oaks:** And, missionaries, you won’t be able to teach repentance unless you practice repentance yourself in your own personal life and in the course of your missionary activities.

**Elder Stephen B. Allen:** It’s valuable for missionaries to examine what they did each day—at the end of the day—to see whether or not they built people’s faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement. Were they focused on repentance? Did they help people prepare to be baptized or to renew those covenants on Sunday? Did they help people feel and understand the promptings of the Holy Ghost, and did they help people endure to the end? If they’re constantly measuring themselves against those five things to say, “How did I spend my time today? Did I actually do those things?” that’s evidence that they truly understand the doctrine of Christ.

**Elder Dallin H. Oaks:** And that probably leads us to the next question, which is this: “I have to teach the doctrine of Christ every day. I’m a new missionary. What’s the best way to teach the doctrine of Christ? How do I help my investigator understand the doctrine I’ve learned? How can I teach that to them?”

**Sister Bonnie L. Oscarson:** One of the things that comes to my mind is what you just said—they have to be living it themselves. And probably one of the most important aspects of this is to be experiencing repentance daily in their lives—to not see repentance as something you only use when you’ve committed some of the big sins, but it’s a daily course correction in our lives. And if they come to understand that principle of repentance, I think they will be able to testify of its value and effect in the lives of those that they’re teaching.
Elder Neil L. Andersen: Well, we’re talking to a worldwide audience, but I’d like to come back to Elder Oaks, and maybe he could comment on what he said: “Don’t skip a step.” Sometimes in those countries where there is a lot of faith in Christ—the Philippines, some of the South American countries—you feel that faith so quickly that you immediately start moving to baptism. And sometimes that element of repentance is . . . it’s not ignored, but it may be just not handled as well as it could. Elder Oaks, would you explain what your feelings were about that? I remember you saying something to us about a trip to England where the issues were a little different and how teaching repentance might be a little different in those countries.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks: Surely. The way we teach repentance depends on the culture of the people, their background (or lack of background) of faith in Christ, and their understanding that repentance means change. As representatives of the restored gospel, it is the function of missionaries to teach what has been restored in the latter days, and that calls for people to make changes, not only in their beliefs but in their lives.

Elder Brent H. Nielson: Elder Oaks, that leads us to the very next segment that we’d like to discuss. If we could show that on the screen, this clip discusses teaching repentance.

[Video excerpt from 2016 Worldwide Missionary Broadcast begins]

Elder Dallin H. Oaks: You would understand from what I’ve just said why it is so important for missionaries to teach repentance. In our day the Lord has commanded missionaries to “say nothing but repentance unto this generation” (D&C 6:9). When a person has gone through the repentance process, the Savior does more than cleanse that person from sin—He also gives him or her new strength. That strengthening is essential for us to realize the purpose of the cleansing, which is to return to our Heavenly Father. To be admitted to His presence, we must be more than clean. We must also be changed from a morally weak person who has sinned into a strong person with the strength to resist sin and the spiritual stature to dwell in the presence of God. That is what it means to be saved. The Savior taught this repentance when He said that His atoning sacrifice was for “all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered” (2 Nephi 2:7).

[Video ends]

Elder Brent H. Nielson: Missionaries often read in the scriptures, and Elder Oaks, you just quoted it, that they are to say nothing except repentance. As a missionary, when they teach all of the lessons, how is it that they should say nothing but repentance? How do they do that?

Elder David A. Bednar: I think too often we, as members of the Church, have a cookbook, checklist mentality about living the gospel. So faith is this little separate thing, and then repentance is a separate thing, and then there’s the ordinance of baptism and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. All things are gathered together in one in Christ. So faith is in the Savior—in Him as the Son of God, in His nature, and in His attributes. Repentance is a dependence upon Him. Faith in Him and depending upon Him is repentance. Following Him is baptism. Pressing forward with Him is enduring to the end, with the companionship of the Holy Ghost. It’s all gathered together in Him. So as we are proclaiming our continuing dependence upon Christ, that is repentance, which leads to the mighty change of heart.

Bishop W. Christopher Waddell: Well, another thought regarding teaching nothing but repentance as they teach all the lessons is that in every lesson,
they are associated with commitments. We are trying to help people to act, as Elder Bednar teaches frequently, not to be acted upon—to be agents. Well, part of that commitment, every time you ask them to do something, you commit them to do something, you're inviting them to repent. And so one way to teach nothing but repentance is to make sure that we are extending appropriate commitments to act. And as they do that, they're changing their lives, and that is a process of repentance.

**Elder Brent H. Nielson:** So the invitation to act itself is an invitation to change.

**Bishop W. Christopher Waddell:** Exactly.

**Elder Dallin H. Oaks:** There is a great symbol of the need for continuing repentance permeating all that we teach in the Lord’s commandment that we will go to the house of prayer each Sabbath day and partake of the sacrament. And so, the sacrament needs to be preceded by repentance, and it's commanded as a weekly ordinance. And the missionaries need to teach that to their investigators. They need to practice that in their personal lives. And that's the way we keep repentance before us all the time.

**Elder Neil L. Andersen:** I like that phrase in the 34th chapter of Alma where Amulek talks about “faith unto repentance” (Alma 34:17). Even though we have very specific commitments, sometimes missionaries can get so focused on those. Do they go to church? Do they keep the Word of Wisdom? We want to see if those we’re teaching are very naturally moving to repentance because of their faith. Are they praying when they don't have to pray? Are they praying in the middle of the night when we're not there? Do they have an inclination to be kinder to their spouse or to their children? A missionary wants to observe these things to see if this faith is drawing someone to repentance in their life. And we see that as someone really begins this mighty change of heart.

**Elder David A. Bednar:** Which is far above and beyond just meeting the requirements of a checklist.

**Elder Neil L. Andersen:** Yes.

**Elder Brent H. Nielson:** And I think that answers the next question that I was going to ask, which is this: How can a missionary who is teaching an investigator know if the investigator is repenting? How can they know if repentance is happening? And I think you just described that for us.

**Sister Bonnie L. Oscarson:** It brings to mind a scripture that talks about seeing the countenance of the Savior within someone. [See 3 Nephi 19:25.] I think as you see someone begin to change, you can see that change, you can see that countenance of the Savior.

**Elder Brent H. Nielson:** How does this apply to missionaries? Do they need to go through the same process themselves?

**Sister Bonnie L. Oscarson:** Absolutely.

**Elder Stephen B. Allen:** Often, missionaries will extend a commitment invitation and then they will forget that they’ve invited people to do something. And the next time they come visit, they start somewhere else. Probably the beginning point, when you go back, is to follow up on the commitment of that person: “How did you do?” And then praise them for what they've done. Build them up. Help them feel glad that they prayed. Don't be critical of them, but build their faith in the Savior.

**Elder David A. Bednar:** Which also then helps the missionaries assess the needs for what they are going to teach. They may have prepared a series of principles, but if they have not responded to the invitation, there may be a need for review and a recommitment—not just charging ahead with what they have planned because they didn't know what was needed until they got to the home of the investigator.
Elder Brent H. Nielson: Very good. Let’s take another look at this same talk, Elder Oaks. This topic is about conversion.

[Video excerpt from 2016 Worldwide Missionary Broadcast begins]

Elder Dallin H. Oaks: The conversion we seek is not just an event that precedes baptism, but a process that follows baptism and continues throughout our lives. You should therefore teach your investigators to study so they can be nourished by the good word of God. Teach them to pray so they can be inspired by the Holy Ghost. Teach them to pay their tithing so they can enjoy the blessings promised for obedience to that important principle of the gospel. Teach them to attend church each Sabbath so they can partake of the sacrament, be renewed in the cleansing effect of their baptism, and enjoy the fulfillment of the Savior’s promise that the Spirit of the Lord will always be with them.

[Video ends]

Elder Brent H. Nielson: Missionaries might ask, “How do I continue to focus my investigators on baptism?” Is there something that they can do as they teach that will help them see the need to be baptized?

Elder David A. Bednar: All things gathered together in one. (See Ephesians 1:10.) Again, if we just treat baptism as separate and apart from, “Okay, I did the repentance thing, so now I guess the next thing is baptism.” It’s ongoing; they’re all interrelated. In my judgment, there is little or no spiritual power in treating these fundamental elements of the doctrine of Christ as separate things. It is when they’re tied together, and we see faith unto repentance, and repentance preceding baptism, and baptism helping us press forward on the straight and narrow path, the covenant pathway. When we see all of those tied together, there’s power—not when they’re separated.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks: Missionaries, I hope you have listened carefully to what Elder Bednar has just said. It may be one of the most important principles that is taught in our worldwide broadcast today. Baptism is not just something that you raise with an investigator as soon as possible to get a commitment. It is something that must be put in the context of the entire gospel of Jesus Christ. Then, a baptismal commitment will be timely and persuasive and will fulfill its purpose. And the time that that commitment is made or that subject is raised, should vary according to the circumstances of the individual being taught and according to the promptings of the Spirit.

Elder Neil L. Andersen: Speaking about baptism, we see very different parts of the world with different situations. I have lived many years in Europe and many years in South America. The availability of baptism, the frequency of baptism, is different in these places. But I think what we’re saying is that baptism is part of the doctrine of Christ. And no missionary should take that out of their vocabulary. That would be something they’re thinking about. The Savior, after He appeared to the people in the land Bountiful, in the next 20 verses He mentioned baptism 11 times. So baptism ought to be something we talk about whether we’re in Norway or we’re in Honduras. And we should be thinking about it. It won’t always occur in the same frequency in one place as the other, but it’s part of the doctrine of Christ. We should not be afraid of it. I know as I was a young missionary in Europe, it took me many months before I ever had someone prepared for baptism. But we don’t ignore it. We don’t set it aside. We think about it, we talk about it. We talk about it with each other, we talk about it with those who are involved in the process of conversion. It’s an important part along the conversion process.

Elder Stephen B. Allen: As we teach the commandments, people will start to feel that the Lord loves them. There will be some commandments that they’ll say, “Oh, I’m living that commandment. I’m obeying that.” And they will feel very good
about themselves. Other commandments will come along and they’ll start to feel the weight of their sins because, for the first time in their lives, they’ve learned that what they’re doing is not pleasing to God. And so that teaching of commandments becomes a great blessing in the lives of people and helps facilitate repentance and the move to baptism because the weight of their sins begins to weigh on them. They say, “What can I do to have this sin removed from me?” And frequently, they’ll ask to be baptized if we’re teaching the commandments properly.

**Elder Brent H. Nielson:** If a missionary gives an invitation to be baptized and the investigator is not ready, or they say they’re not sure they want to be baptized, how does a missionary press forward even though they have been turned down that first time, even though the investigator isn’t ready? What do they do to press forward with this investigator?

**Sister Bonnie L. Oscarson:** I think there’s such value in missionaries bearing testimony with the Spirit of the importance of these different principles that are a part of the process leading to baptism. And as they bear testimony, the Spirit will then confirm in the hearts of those to whom they’re speaking the truthfulness of it. There is just such a great power in bearing testimony.

**Bishop W. Christopher Waddell:** I think missionaries also need to understand that different people have different timelines. It’s not a contest to see how many we can baptize, and if they’re not ready, then we’re going to dump them and move on to somebody else. It’s continuing to work with that individual—unless they tell them, “Don’t ever come back again. I don’t want to see you again,” and shut the door, and kick them out. It’s working with them. It’s being patient with them. It’s finding out what their concerns are and continuing to teach, seeking the direction of the Spirit on what those people need. And if they need more time, then they need more time. And that’s fine. There are wonderful people who join the Church after meeting with missionaries for longer periods of time, while some don’t take as much time. But the Lord will direct those missionaries. So be patient with them, and continue to teach.

**Elder Brent H. Nielson:** Elder Oaks, the last segment we’d like to show from your talk is about establishing the Church.

[Video excerpt from 2016 Worldwide Missionary Broadcast begins]

**Elder Dallin H. Oaks:** Establishing the Church is a vital direction in the work to which you’ve been called. You’re not just called to proclaim the gospel, you’re called to establish the Church. As President Hinckley often taught, we should all seek to grow the ward—that is part of your missionary activities. Think of that as you seek to find persons to add to your teaching pool. Teach the gospel to investigators and retain them in activity after their baptisms. Reactivation is also an important part of establishing the Church, so are the assignments you may receive to labor in individual wards or branches. But never lose sight of your paramount responsibility, which is to teach repentance and baptize converts.

[Video ends]

**Elder Brent H. Nielson:** I think an 18-year-old missionary might ask, “What does it look like to establish the Church?” They’ve been asked to go out and establish the Church. What does that look like if you’re a new missionary?

**Elder Dallin H. Oaks:** I think one thing we would say to new missionaries is that if you are doing all that we are talking about in this meeting of the Missionary Executive Council, you are establishing the Church. If you are doing what you are assigned to do, if you are following your leaders, if you are maintaining loving and cooperative relations with the officers, teachers, and members of the wards in which you labor, you are going to be establishing the Church.
Elder Brent H. Nielson: So is there a difference between teaching repentance and baptizing converts and establishing the Church? Are they two different assignments, or are they all one?

Elder Dallin H. Oaks: No. Establishing the Church is inherent in teaching repentance and baptizing converts. And if we take the wide view, when a person is baptized, we don't cease to be concerned about them. And if they become inactive, someone taught by an earlier set of missionaries, we don't cease to be concerned about them. It's all part of establishing the Church. Teaching repentance and reactivating people previously baptized is an important part of that.

Elder Neil L. Andersen: But one thing you see is that missionaries do much more than just teach new converts or teach new investigators. For example, how many of us could name a young person who went on a mission because a missionary touched him? He was a member of the Church, maybe even active in the Church, but a missionary helped instill in that person the desire to share the gospel. So we are constantly, as missionaries, having interface with members of the Church—those less-active and those active. Our testimony, our faith, and our strength are part of strengthening the whole of the Church.

Elder David A. Bednar: There is a long view to be considered. The ultimate strength of the Church arises when a person receives the gospel, receives the ordinances and the covenants, remains true and faithful, marries, has children, and they teach those children to be true and faithful. Their children grow up and follow that same pattern so that across the generations, you have a pattern of faithfulness. Ultimately, those multi generational families who are faithful—that really constitutes the ultimate strength of the Church. So the baptism is important as a beginning, but it's a step on that covenant pathway leading to the temple and continuing ordinances, covenants, and faithfulness.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks: I will give an example of what has just been mentioned. When missionaries return from their field of labor, some make the mistake of neglecting the spiritual nourishment that was an everyday activity in the field. They stop reading the scriptures. They stop or become irregular in their prayer and in partaking of the sacrament. Now, those who don't make that mistake, who continue in the missionary worthiness and attunement with the Spirit of the Lord, are establishing the Church because they continue faithful. They marry in the temple. They raise families to do what has been described. So some of the most important things you'll do to establish the Church are after you return from the mission field. Make those habits in the field, brethren and sisters, and carry them throughout your lives when you return.

Elder Brent H. Nielson: Is there anything a missionary can do to determine whether or not they're establishing the Church in their work now? It is long-term, as you mentioned, and it isn't just a baptism. You've mentioned, Elder Oaks, that it's everything, when they are following their leaders. Is there some evidence they can look to? Do you think that will help them know that they are establishing the Church, that they are doing what they need to be doing to fulfill that responsibility?

Bishop W. Christopher Waddell: I will go on and continue something Elder Andersen had mentioned a little bit earlier, and that had to do with missionaries not just talking about the whole doctrine of Christ, which is something we've been discussing this whole time—it's the whole doctrine, not just one aspect, and not just focusing on baptism, but faith and repentance. And so if there is a missionary that's just focusing on baptism only—and the numbers, if you will—that's not going to do a lot to establish the Church. But if they are focusing on assisting someone who is going through that process, so that you're teaching repentance and baptizing a convert, then the missionary may not be there long enough to see the fruition of everything, as was mentioned. But as they really, really teach the
whole doctrine of Christ, not just one aspect of it, they can know and be certain that they are assisting to establish the Church.

*Sister Bonnie L. Oscarson:* I think part of establishing the Church, too, is making sure that these converts, as they are truly converted, are closely connected to the local church, to the members. So it falls upon the missionary to make sure that members are involved in that conversion process too, so that when converts do move on, they have a support group that can continue to nourish them and help them along.

**Elder Stephen B. Allen:** Missionaries’ success is tied very much to their relationship with members of the Church. And sometimes missionaries think of the doctrine of Christ as applying only to non members. Whereas building someone’s faith and helping them repent and renew their baptismal covenant are things that members are supposed to be doing, and do, every week. And so building the faith of the members is critically important, and helping them repent, and helping them partake of the sacrament, and have that great experience in sacrament meeting and feel the influence of the Holy Ghost, and endure to the end. Missionaries bless lives of people that are nearing death by helping them endure. And I think they establish the Church that way also.

**Elder Brent H. Nielson:** Elder Bednar.

**Elder David A. Bednar:** Part of your question, as I hear it, is how does the missionary know? And I hope I don’t sound harsh, but a part of how you know is when you quit worrying about it. The success isn’t given to the missionary for him or for her. Success is a blessing and a gift from the Lord. Let me just read this from Alma 26: “Yea, he that repenteth and exerciseth faith, and bringeth forth good works, and prayeth continually without ceasing—unto such it is given [emphasize the word *given*] to know the mysteries of God . . . [and] unto such it shall be *given* to reveal things which never have been revealed; yea, and it shall be *given* unto such to bring thousands of souls to repentance” (Alma 26:22; italics added). Many missionaries read this and say, “If I just follow this checklist, I’m going to baptize thousands.” Only if God gives it to you. And then if you go to verse 27: “Now when our hearts were depressed, and we were about to turn back, behold, the Lord comforted us, and said: Go amongst thy brethren, the Lamanites, and bear with patience thine afflictions, and I will give unto you success” (Alma 26:27). So I think the measure is: Will a missionary do the simple things every day he or she knows that he or she should do, regardless of whether or not the Lord chooses to bless them with success? Then, you’re really establishing the Church.