Brethren, whether you serve as Regional Representatives or stake presidents, we hope you appreciate, even in a small measure, how much the General Authorities love you and how much we count on you! How grateful we are to see the Church in such able hands! In fact, we are probably more impressed with you than you are with yourselves! This is as it should be.

Given the array of your administrative duties, the piles of paper through which you must plow, and the multitudes of meetings which you must either direct or attend, we hope—in the midst of "all these things"—that you will view Church programs as necessary and proximate means, but not as ultimate ends. Likewise, we hope your perspective is such that you will view some of our organizations as much-needed mortal scaffolding—but the family as an eternal structure. "The home is the ultimate unit of the Church. In the end as in the beginning the home will be the unit of progress and government." (John A. Widtsoe, Priesthood and Church Government (Deseret Book Company, 1939), p. 80.)

Furthermore, in the midst of the required emphases on the "how to" and the "what" of Church government and administration—please do not let yourselves or others forget the grand "why" of it all! In our Church service, sometimes, before once more "plunging in," it is well to pause and ponder the vast scope and the grand purposes of the eternal enterprise of which we are privileged to be a part.

Astrophysicists tell us that this planet earth is actually a tiny planet, a "speck of sand," which is located in a comparatively small solar system (even though Jupiter is so large it could contain 1,000 earths). We are further told that our small solar system is at the outer edge of what, to us, is the awesome Milky Way galaxy. Indeed, that canopy which the unaided eye sees on a starlit night is part of the Milky Way galaxy.

But if we receded a sufficient distance into space, even the overwhelming Milky Way galaxy would shrink into a bright dot, one of countless bright dots, for there are an estimated 100 billion galaxies in the vastness of space! In such a context, President Brigham Young's assertion that among the vast creations of God, there are "millions of earths like this one" is modest. (Discourse 11 July 1852. Journal of Discourses, Vol. 1, pp. 37-42). Yet this earth, said Isaiah, was "established" and "created" specifically "to be inhabited"—to carry out God's purposes. Brethren, this time is our time to inhabit this purposeful planet. (Is. 45:18.)

Thus, in the midst of this vastness, this seeming astral aloneness, there is divine assurance and even incredible intimacy. Not only are all the stars and planets numbered, but so is each hair of our heads, and not one sparrow falls from the sky unnoticed by God (Moses 1:35; Matt. 10:29,30).

We, in our tiny travels, may be overwhelmed by distance, but God is not. We may feel lost in a dense urban throng, but we are never lost to Him! Indeed, every soul, like every snowflake, is, in some respect, unique. Hence the gospel net gathers "of every kind." (Matt. 13:47.)
Both on this planet and in space, therefore, what is rolling onward and 
onward is God's plan of salvation—for the "why" of it all is "to bring to 
the immortality and eternal life of man." (Moses 1:39) Such is the 
universal, but personal, enterprise of which, fortunately, we are a part! No 
wonder Nephi reverently exclaimed, "O how great the plan of our God!" (2 Ne. 
9:13.)

Therefore, as shepherds of the flock, rather than mere managers of 
Church programs, see to it, brethren, that the surpassing "why" of it all is 
not lost sight of. Be good administrators, yes! But let your flock know you 
and experience you in even more important ways. Then they can give to you 
that accolade given to deserving leaders anciently: "Our leaders were mighty 
men in the faith of the Lord" (Jarom 1:7.)

Remember, we can only lead others—the men and women of Christ—"in a 
straight and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery" and "land 
their souls . . . at the right hand of God"—if we are going that very way 
(Hel. 3:29, 30.)

Being shepherds of the flock and "mighty men in the faith of the Lord" 
will insure inspiration in your administration. You will then strike the 
appropriate balance between principles and programs, ends and means—and in 
your teaching and leading styles as between exhortation, explanation, 
experience, and example.

There will, for instance, be even more power in your performance (as 
priesthood leaders, fathers, and husbands) if, in facing your leadership 
challenges, you regularly apply Alma's counsel to "try the virtue of the word 
of God." For, as Alma observed, the words of the holy scriptures are "more 
powerful than . . . anything else." (Alma 31:5.) Therefore, let us search, 
not scan, the blessed new publications of the scriptures and feast—not 
nibble—on the word of God! (2 Ne. 31:20.)

Alma observed the saints of his time owed "all" their "happiness to the 
sacred word of God." (Alma 44:5.) Brethren, it will be no different for us!

The scriptures constitute mankind's moral memory—a memory without 
which whole nations can perish. Alma also declared how the scriptures 
enlarged the memory" of his people. (Alma 37:8.) Paul counseled concerning 
the benefits of the holy scriptures as follows: "For whatsoever things were 
written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and 
comfort of the scriptures might have hope." (Romans 15:4.)

In a world increasingly filled with a sense of despair, the nourishment 
of justified hope is a cardinal concern of the Church.

May I share, from these holy scriptures, some basic 
counsel—appropriate for all of us as each pursues his callings?

And see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is 
not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength. And 
again, it is expedient that he should be diligent, that thereby he 
might win the prize; therefore, all things must be done in order. 
(Mosiah 4:27, underlinings added.)

Do not run faster or labor more than you have strength and means 
provided . . . but be diligent unto the end. (D&C 10:4, underlinings 
added.)
If we will strive for pace and constancy, then we and our flocks will get farther faster. If we follow those words of counsel, brethren, there will be more quiet effectiveness and less conspicuous busyness. We will also have more spiritual stamina for performing that simple but demanding act of deep discipleship which Jesus prescribed: "take up his cross daily." (Luke 9:23.)

In your teaching and leading, take the time needed to explain to members the "why" of "what" is wanted--just as in Ezra's time when they read the holy scriptures, they did so "distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." (Neh. 8:8.) To help our members to understand how the fundamental purposes of the work of the Lord are linked with daily living is a great need among our people now. The chaff must be blown away so the nourishing kernel can be found!

The simplicity in the principles of the gospel of Jesus should be matched by simplicity in our Church administration and programs. Illustratively, in member missionary work, consider what harvest and retention would occur if, today, our faithful Saints would merely do as Cornelius did and hold occasional cottage meetings in their homes! "And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends." (Acts 10:24.) Complexity, brethren, is a regular, if unintended, contributor to our failures and frustrations.

In focusing on the fundamentals of your sacred callings, do not let yourselves be diverted into doing other chores—even though these are useful:

And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.

Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. (Acts 6:1,2.)

Surely those converted later in Corinth and Rome were glad the Twelve did not allow themselves to be drawn into becoming regional welfare administrators staying in Jerusalem. Delegation, instead, met the needs of the deserving Greek widows. Take care so as to not "leave the word of God, and serve tables" when equivalent hard choices are required of you in your callings.

In delegating, brethren, do it not only for your sake, but for the sake of the people—lest they wear away, too:

And Moses' father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest is not good.

Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone. (Ex. 18:17,18.)

Thereafter, all could not see Moses, but all could see an appointed someone. Since inaccessible leaders will seldom prove to be inspirational leaders, wise delegation is a must!

Provide, in your busy lives, a little time for rest, renewal, solitude, and pondering:
And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught.

And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat.

And they departed into a desert place by ship privately. (Mark 6:30-32.)

When we are revived and renewed, physically and spiritually, we can then better renew and revive Church members. So often, a little solitude for pondering, including pondering the grand "why" of God's plan, then provides the "how" for the solving of a pressing problem.

Let us keep especially before us, as the Lord's leaders, that most basic developmental objective which lies at the very center of this mortal school, a school with customized curricula in which the teaching and tutoring are never finished—until the last bell has rung:

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (Matt. 5:48.)

Therefore I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect. (3 Ne. 12:48.)

... Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am. (3 Ne. 27:27.)

Hence the need for us to strive, personally and persistently, to develop the eternal attributes such as love, mercy, justice, patience, submissiveness, etc. These attributes are, and will always be, needed.

Hence the need for us to develop further the everlasting skills—such as how to motivate, to communicate, to delegate, and to manage our time and talents. These skills will never be obsolete.

So focused, we can keep Lehi's splendid valedictory counsel: "Be men, and be determined in one mind, and one heart, united in all things." (2 Ne. 1:21.)

My beloved brethren, there is no leadership training objective before us which is comparable to striving to become like Him whose Church this is. The very priesthood we hold involves access to the Lord's power, and it should not surprise us that His power can truly and fully be exercised only when we are "connected with the powers of heaven," which powers "cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness." (D&C 121:36.)

In fact, the Lord even prescribes the very way in which we are to lead—with specific words which describe the style and substance which should become ours: Persuasion, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, love-unfeigned, kindness, and pure knowledge. (D&C 121:41-42.)

Are not these very virtues and attributes the virtues and attributes of the Father and the Son?

In so prescribing for us, is not the Lord actually describing the substance and style of His own leadership?
Brethren, as experience by experience and grace by grace, we become more like Them, then it should not surprise us that, one day, our confidence will wax strong in Their presence. Besides, only if we are increasingly like Them, could we truly be at home with Them.

Then, the Holy Ghost will be our constant, not intermittent, Companion. Then, our scepter will be a scepter of righteousness, and the efficacy and legitimacy of our leadership would never be questioned. And any dominions bequeathed would flow freely and everlastingly, "without compulsory means"! (D&C 121:46.)

The pursuit and development of these qualities and attributes in our lives should be at the very center of our discipleship! These are the qualities which will rise with us in the resurrection—and precious little else.

Of course, there are times, brethren, when Church discipline must be administered and when reproof is called for. But, as in the aforecited revelation, when it occurs, if it does so in a context of love unfeigned, then the reproof is more apt to be productive. We are to love even when that love is unreciprocated. So it was with our atoning Savior as we read in these touching lines:

And the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught; wherefore they scourge him, and he suffereth it; and they smite him, and he suffereth it, because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men. (1 Ne. 19:9.)

Indeed, the priesthood posture prescribed by the Lord rests on love. Moreover, not only do the revelations say it is so, but the lessons of history tell us that long-suffering, persuasion, love, gentleness, and kindness are actually the only ways in which human behavior can be changed—both freely and irrevocably! Other means are usually cosmetic and inefficient.

Yes, hearts occasionally have to be broken when they are too set upon the things of the world. But, again, love and long-suffering are necessary to help those whom we lead and serve to follow Ezekiel's counsel to "make you a new heart." (Ez. 18:31.) Such changes in the hearts of the flock are best encouraged by leaders who, like another anointed leader, are themselves the recipients of "another heart." (1 Sam. 10:9.)

Happily, as you and I draw closer to the Lord, brethren, we will be nourished even more by the fruits of His Spirit. Unsurprisingly, these fruits are, wrote a perceptive Paul, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, and faith. (Gal. 5:22.) Once again, there is that same seamless web of spiritual traits:

These are likewise the traits which help us to meet the daily challenges of mortality in which, as has been wisely said, "The cross comes before the crown and tomorrow is a Monday morning." (C. S. Lewis, Weight of Glory)

As "mighty men in the faith of the Lord," may this be the pattern of our priesthood leadership in action, brethren, I pray in the name of the true and perfect Shepherd, Jesus Christ, Amen.