

## Living Joyfully:

### A Tribute to President Russell M. Nelson, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

On September 27, 2025, President Russell M. Nelson passed away at the age of 101. He was the world's oldest leader of a global-faith organization. He was the 17<sup>th</sup> president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, having served in that position since January 14, 2018.

#### Healing Hearts

Before becoming the president of the Church, President Nelson was a world-renowned heart surgeon who performed the first open-heart surgery in Utah in 1955. He served his residency in surgery at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston and at the University of Minnesota. His professional work included the positions of research professor of surgery and director of the Thoracic Surgery Residency at the University of Utah and chairman of the Division of Thoracic Surgery at LDS Hospital in Salt Lake City. He received many awards for his professional work, including the Distinguished Alumni Award from the University of Utah; the Heart of Gold Award from the American Heart Association; a citation for International Service from the American Heart Association; and the Golden Plate Award, presented by the American Academy of Achievement.

The Church's official tribute stated: "As a 'beloved physician' President Nelson literally touched the hearts of hundreds of patients suffering from physical ailments. As a disciple of Christ, he healed hearts through word and deed."<sup>1</sup>

#### Being a Peacemaker

President Nelson was best known as an international bridge builder and peacemaker. He visited faith leaders throughout the world. In March 2019, he traveled to Italy and met with Pope Francis at the Vatican. He also built strong relationships with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The Reverend Amos C. Brown commented at President Nelson's passing: "I had the privilege to introduce him to the NAACP convention in Detroit in 2019, and for the rest of his life we came to know and deeply respect one another. I came to know him as a person of great integrity and courage, who loved God and his church, and who was dedicated to being an agent of change."<sup>2</sup> Reverend Brown went on to describe President Nelson as "my brother of a different mother."<sup>3</sup>

President Nelson urged all Latter-day Saints to be peacemakers who "build, lift, encourage, persuade, and inspire — no matter how difficult the situation." He continued, "Brothers and

sisters, we can literally change the world — one person and one interaction at a time. How? By modeling how to manage honest differences of opinion with mutual respect and dignified dialogue.” He further emphasized, “If your verbal arsenal is filled with insults and accusations, now is the time to put them away.”<sup>4</sup>

### Living Joyfully

Another major theme of Pres. Nelson’s ministry was the importance of living joyfully despite difficulties: “When the focus of our lives is on Jesus Christ and His gospel, we can feel joy regardless of what is happening – or not happening – in our lives. Joy comes from and because of Him. He is the source of all joy.”<sup>5</sup>

President Nelson experienced heart-breaking tragedies in his own life. His beloved wife, Dantzel White (m. 1945), died in 2005. They were blessed with ten children – nine daughters and one son. Two of their daughters died before he did. While these experiences brought him great sadness as he missed these dear ones, he taught: “[W]e live to die and we die to live – in another realm. If we are well prepared, death brings no terror. From an eternal perspective, death is premature only for those who are not prepared to meet God.”<sup>6</sup>

Currently, his posterity numbers over 300 people, including grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He is also survived by his second wife, Wendy Watson (m. 2006).

At his funeral, his daughter, Lauren N. Marsh, talked about the joy she experienced in their home as she grew up. She remembered walking and skipping with her dad, popping popcorn together, listening to her dad play the organ, and watching him snuggle his grandchildren. “I will sorely miss the joy and light that my dad’s physical presence has brought to my life. But I know he has great faith in you and me and will always be cheering each and every one of us on, inviting us to joyfully live with Christ in the center of our lives.”<sup>7</sup>

### Influencing Others for Good

His only son, Russell M. Nelson, Jr., also spoke at his funeral, remembering the way his father ministered to individuals as well as to large crowds, always seeking to emulate the life of Jesus Christ. He also talked about how he continually strived to honor his father’s name. He extended this invitation to members of the Church: “Each of us have taken upon ourselves the name of our Savior Jesus Christ. We try to emulate Him and be more like Him and do our best to honor His name. May we continue to follow our prophets, make and keep sacred covenants, and be peacemakers in our lives.”<sup>8</sup>

President Dallin H. Oaks was called to be an apostle just hours after President Nelson. They sat next to each other for 34 years as apostles. When President Nelson became the Church’s prophet leader, he called President Oaks as his first counselor. At the funeral,

President Oaks said, “His writings and his influence and his example live on. And so does our grief at his passing.”<sup>9</sup> He added that President Nelson’s life “bore witness of his committed testimony as a prophet and servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

President Nelson’s influence goes far beyond the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. His messages of peacemaking, of joyful living even in the face of difficulty, and of healing hearts have made him beloved by his family, by Church leaders and members, and by people around the world. He will be missed by those whose lives he touched with his love, his kindness, and his warmth.

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<sup>1</sup> “Remembering the Life of President Russell M. Nelson,” 7 September 2025, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints press release, Salt Lake City, UT.

<sup>2</sup> “The Rev. Amos C. Brown: A Tribute to my ‘brother of a different mother’ – President Russell M. Nelson, 7 October 2025, Deseret News.

<sup>3</sup> “The Rev. Amos C. Brown: A Tribute to my ‘brother of a different mother’ – President Russell M. Nelson, 7 October 2025, Deseret News.

<sup>4</sup> “Peacemakers Needed,” President Russell M. Nelson, General Conference, April 2023.

<sup>5</sup> “Joy and Spiritual Survival,” President Russell M. Nelson, General Conference, October 2016.

<sup>6</sup> “Now is the Time to Prepare,” President Russell M. Nelson, General Conference, April 2005.

<sup>7</sup> “President Nelson Remembered for Decisive Leadership and Unwavering Testimony of Christ,” 7 October 2025, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Press Release, Salt Lake City, UT.

<sup>8</sup> “President Nelson Remembered for Decisive Leadership and Unwavering Testimony of Christ,” 7 October 2025, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Press Release, Salt Lake City, UT.

<sup>9</sup> “President Nelson Remembered for Decisive Leadership and Unwavering Testimony of Christ,” 7 October 2025, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Press Release, Salt Lake City, UT.