

The Importance of the Right Question

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One of the things I admire most about those in the legal professions that I know well is the discipline of thought that comes from the training they've received. Disciplined, rigorous processes of thought and discourse are of inestimable value, because they help us ensure that we're reaching the right conclusions from the evidence available. I thought I'd organize my remarks this evening around some rather glaring instances in which undisciplined processes of thought, engaged in by otherwise intelligent, sincere, inspired people, have led to destructive public policies, and, in some instances, actions that have impeded the growth of the church.

A turning point in my intellectual life occurred in November 1977 while I was sitting on the top row of Room 9, Aldrich Hall at the Harvard Business School, engaged with my section-mates in the 1st-year marketing course, discussing a case study about a peanut butter company. I was taking notes about what the management of the company should have done differently, when I put down the pen with a troubling realization: I was not going to work for a peanut butter company – and even if I did, I'd never see a problem like this one. So why am I taking notes about what they should have done ten years earlier? Just then, a woman in the class made an absolutely brilliant comment. Rather than write down her comment, however, for some reason I asked, "What question did she ask of the case when she was preparing for the discussion that led her to such a great insight?" So I wrote that question down on a sheet of paper. A bit later during the case discussion another classmate made a similarly insightful comment. Again, I asked, "What question did he ask of the case that led to that insight?" I then wrote that question on the line under the first.

That afternoon when I was preparing for the next day's marketing case discussion, I put those two questions on the table while I read, and asked those questions of the case. They helped me get insights that I otherwise would have missed. From that time on, as I listened to the class discussion I would keep noting what questions led to the important insights. I would add them to my list and use them to prepare the next day's case. Sometimes I'd find that a question that was useful for a specific case rarely was useful on others, I'd cross it off my list – so over the course of the semester I iterated towards Clayton Christensen's custom method for thinking through a class of problems. The rare and valuable skill, I slowly realized, was to ask the right question. That done, getting the right answer was typically quite straightforward.

Unfortunately, too many of us are so eager to debate and get on with the right answer and the solution, that we often forget even to think about whether the right question has been asked. Lawyers pride themselves on their ability to ask penetrating questions, but I honestly think that the only people who are worse than lawyers at asking the right questions are

business managers; and that the only people who are worse than managers at asking the right questions are Mormons.

I'd like to tell of 5 - 6 instances where people like us have plunged into debates about what the right answer or solution is, without taking the care to define the salient question to which we need good answers. Because we've been debating answers to the wrong questions, in each case we've traveled a significant distance in the wrong direction – and in several of these instances there are no visible exits from the roads we've chosen.

An Insightful Gift from China: Religion, Democracy and Free Markets

I had a conversation recently with a Marxist economist from China who was nearing the end of a fellowship at a Boston-area university where he had come to study western capitalism and democracy. I asked my Chinese friend if he had learned here anything on these topics that was surprising or unexpected. His response was immediate and, to me, quite profound: “I had no idea how critical religion is to the functioning of democracy and capitalism.” I had never made this association between religion and democracy in my mind, so I asked him to explain. He continued,

“You don't see it because you grew up in this society. But to me it is one of the most unique things I have seen here. In your past, most Americans attended a church or synagogue every week. These are institutions that people respected. When you were there, from your youngest years, you were taught that you should voluntarily obey the law; that you should respect other people's property, and not steal. You were taught to be honest, even when it's not comfortable. Religions taught Americans that they should voluntarily pay their taxes – even though the probability that the government would catch tax cheaters is low. People came to believe that even if the police didn't catch them if they broke a law, God would surely catch them. Democracy works because most people most of the time voluntarily obey most of the laws.”

You can say the same for capitalism. It works because Americans have been taught in their churches that they should keep their promises and not tell lies. An advanced economy cannot function if people cannot expect that when they sign contracts, the other people will voluntarily uphold their obligations. In America, if you borrow money you repay it, without the lender having to hire thugs to force you to repay. If you order products from a company, they can ship them and trust that you will voluntarily send them a check. Capitalism works because most people voluntarily keep their promises. In many countries, banks cannot lend money to small businesses because there is no trust, and taking people who do not repay money to court is ineffective.

My friend then invited me to look around the world at those countries where, in his words, “America had naively snapped its fingers and demanded, ‘We want democracy here, and we want it now!’” Unless there was already a strong religious foundation in those countries, he asserted, democracy has failed miserably. There are religions in every country, of course. But he made clear that democracy-enabling religions are those that support the sanctity of life, the equality of people, the importance of respecting others' property, and the importance of personal honesty. Those religions also had to be strong enough that they held

power over the behavior of a large majority of the population. People had to believe that God would punish them even if the police and court system did not. He then gave some examples.

In Russia, for instance, there are religions – but few people are influenced by them. As a result most people avoid taxes, and the government cannot afford to collect them. Murder, bribery and stealing are a part of everyday life. In Poland, in contrast, where the Catholic Church maintained a broad influence throughout the years of communism, capitalism and democracy are working much better. He noted that American foreign policy has been naïve in Haiti and the nations of Africa that have been torn by such brutal civil strife. “You just think that because democracy works for you, and has worked in western Europe, that it will work everywhere. It *only* works where there is a strong foundation of religion.”

My Chinese friend has heightened my concern that as religion loses its power over the lives of Americans, we are living on momentum. It is a momentum that was established by vibrant religions, and then became a part of our culture. Today there are many people in America who are not religious, who still voluntarily obey the law, follow through on their contracts and respect other people’s rights and property. This is because certain religious teachings have become embedded in our culture. But culture is not a stalwart protector of democracy’s enabling values. When people stop going to their churches, or if our churches lose their power over our culture, our system will not sustain itself. What other institutions will teach these values to Americans with the power required to guide their daily behavior?

The debate on the extent to which religious expression can be allowed in public life has been vigorous, and religion is monotonically losing ground. Whether it is the Ten Commandments etched into the stone of state and court houses, nativity scenes in public squares, the ability of school choirs to sing religious songs or having prayers at public school graduation exercises, religion increasingly is being pushed out of public view and public discourse. We have let the enemies of religion frame this debate incorrectly. Somehow the advocates of separation of church and state can’t understand what my Chinese friend saw so clearly – that the religious institutions whose role on the public stage they hope to minimize are in fact among the fundamental *enablers* of the civil liberties that we all now enjoy.

My friend’s insight has helped me understand what the valuable question really is: “Because democracy is possible only when most people most of the time voluntarily obey the laws, what institutions are inculcating this instinct amongst the American people? And how can we strengthen those institutions, so that they do this better?” Instead of debating in the question about what degree of separation of church and state the Framers intended, we need instead to be debating the answer to this right question.

Is Democracy Best for Everyone in Every Situation?

We have literally spent trillions of dollars trying to bring the freedoms of democratic governments to Lebanon, the Balkan states, Haiti, Afghanistan, Iraq, Liberia, Rwanda, Pakistan, and many more countries. Many with compassionate hearts and liberal minds have

staunchly opposed China's membership in the World Trade Organization, and even its right to host the Olympic Games, because its totalitarian government denies its citizens certain rights that those of us in democratic nations enjoy. We anguish that little by little, democracy is giving way to dictatorship in Russia. Trying to make trial-by-jury work in Iraq and Afghanistan has been worse than climbing a mudslide: People are committing heinous crimes at a much faster rate than a legal system grounded in democratic principles can handle. And our government seems to have played a role in engineering the ouster of rulers such as Batista, Duvalier, Marcos, Allende, Ortega and Suharto.

All of these actions and initiatives are built upon an assumption that in every one of these situations, democracy is a better form of government than a dictatorship. Remember that even with our strong religions, it took Americans 150 years to learn democracy before we became independent with our own constitution. And then it took another 150 years until all Americans – African Americans, women, and people without money and property – could enjoy all the benefits of democracy.

When the instinct of even a minority of people in a society is to steal what belongs to others, lie when it suits their selfish purposes, evade taxes, and disregard the rights of others to live and enjoy the same freedoms that they themselves seek, then democracy won't work. It requires the rule of someone who can define good laws and then wield the power required to compel obedience to those laws. Living proofs of this hypothesis cover the globe. Just run this experiment. The next time you're in a taxi with a Haitian driver, just ask whether things are better now that they were under the corrupt rule of "Baby Doc" Duvalier. I guarantee that every one of them pines for the day when there was an iron-fisted ruler who had the instinct and ability to stomp his heel into the chest of those who didn't follow the rules.

It's not a coincidence that the countries that have transitioned from poverty to prosperity in the last 40 years – including Korea, Chile, Taiwan, Singapore, Portugal – all were led by relatively honest but iron-fisted dictators, who had the instinct and ability to wield power quite ruthlessly, in some instances, to break the vested interests of companies and families that profited from the controls and restraints on trade that had trapped those nations in poverty. Democracy has gradually taken root in these nations, as conditions that enable its functioning coalesced. Impoverished countries with democratic governments such as the Philippines, in contrast, struggle to prosper because premature imposition of democracy has simply democratized corruption to the point that the investments that otherwise would stimulate economic growth simply cannot be made, because you can't bribe enough people.

The fact that American policy simply has assumed that democracy is the right answer for everyone has resulted in unfathomable misery in country after country where, in my friend's language, we have snapped our fingers and demanded, "We want democracy right here, right now!" My friend's insight suggests that we haven't asked the right question – which I think is: "Is the requisite foundation for democracy – which is an instinct to obey the laws even when not compelled to do so – imbued into the hearts and minds of nearly everyone in these countries?"

If so, democracy will work. If not, trying to impose democracy will result in a breakdown of social order. Lord John Fletcher Moulton, the great English jurist of the early 20th century, gave us the best way that I have ever encountered to assess the probability that democracy and free markets will flourish in a nation: “The extent of obedience to the unenforceable.”

Who is not here?

I could go on for a very long time, reciting tragedies that have or will occur because we’ve been so eager or argumentative about solutions that we’ve not framed the correct question. But in the interest of time, let me suggest some instances in our own church where the growth of the Kingdom of God has been impaired by leaders who have been so eager for answers that they’ve not thought about what the right question is that needs first to be asked, in order to get the answer that God wants us to have.

Here’s an interesting example: A question that is asked every Sunday in every ward and branch in the LDS church is, “How many people attended Sacrament Meeting today? Our clerks walk up and down the aisles to count that number, and then they store it in their offices for safekeeping, so that they can fill out the quarterly report. But our clerks are collecting the right answer to the wrong question. The right question was framed by the Savior in his parable of the Good Shepherd: “How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?” (Matthew 18:12). In other words, the Savior said that the right question is, “Who didn’t come today?”

Let me tell you the story of a small band of Saints in the Boston area who asked this right question. In the early 1990s the Cambridge Ward met in the Harvard Square chapel. There were probably 500 members in that ward, but over 300 of them were inactive. Most of the inactive lived in the communities of Malden, Everett, Revere and Chelsea – working class communities where it was quite easy to baptize people, because they lived in circumstances that compelled them to be humble. But when these good people would brave their way to the Harvard Square chapel, they found a ward whose leadership ranks – in fact every rank – was filled to overflowing with talented, experienced, qualified life-long members who had come to Boston to study at MIT and Harvard. The vast majority of these members quickly felt that they didn’t fit, and fell into inactivity.

Facing this challenge, Cambridge Ward Bishop Kim Clark and our stake president, Mitt Romney, decided to establish a “twig” (too small to be a branch) of the church in Malden. They held their first meeting in the home of Sister Letha May, who rarely had come to church but nonetheless had good feelings about it. Twelve people came on that first Sunday. President Romney had told them that if they got 20 people attending, he would rent a meeting hall for them to use on Sunday. So after that first Sacrament Meeting those 12 members and 2 missionaries huddled together and asked themselves the question that the Savior said good shepherds ask: “Who else could have come here today, who didn’t come?” They then each took an assignment to contact one of those people that same day, with the message, “We missed you! Are you okay? Is there anything we can do to help? Can you

come next week? We need you!” The next Sunday they set up 20 chairs in Sister May’s living room, and after the meeting they again huddled to ask that same question, and answer it by taking assignments to contact each of them that day.

Within a couple of months they had filled all 20 chairs, and President Romney helped them rent a hall for their Sunday meetings. But they soon learned how inconvenient this was – they had to bring the podium, hymn books, sacrament equipment, and keyboard with them every Sunday and then take it home again. They asked President Romney if they could just rent the hall for the entire week. He said they could – as soon as they had 40 members attending Sacrament Meeting. So the next Sunday they set up 40 chairs, and kept having that meeting after church to ask the right questions: “Who else could have come today who didn’t? And “Who is going to contact them today to tell them how much we need them?” Within a year 40 people were attending, and they were able to lease the space week-round.

The members of the Malden Branch were feeling their oats, however, and asked President Romney if he thought they might ever be able to have their own chapel. He responded that they could – but they needed to have attendance up to 80 people to qualify for a Phase I building. So the next Sunday they set up 60 chairs, and kept having that meeting after church where they kept asking the right question. Within 2 years they had filled those chairs, and 2 years after that had filled the next 20. They just kept asking that question.

I’ve always wondered why the Savior preceded the telling of his parable of the Good Shepherd with the question, “What think ye?” Now I think I know. Perhaps, in our parlance, this would be phrased, “What in the world are you *thinking* when all you do is count the number of my sheep that came into the fold every Sunday? The ones that ***I’m*** most worried about most are those that didn’t come!”

Before you leave Boston, I invite you to drive north out of downtown on Route 1. In about 10 minutes, at the Sargent Street exit, look to the left. There is a beautiful Phase-II chapel, home to the Revere 1st and 2nd wards – a beautiful monument to that small band of members who asked the right question.

Who will do the best job in this calling?

I have observed as I’ve travelled throughout the Northeast in my calling that some branches grew until they hit sacrament meeting attendance of 40, and then they leveled off. Others grew to 60, and others to 80, before their growth flattened. Others grew to 120, 150, and even 200, but in each case growth in attendance flattened on those plateaus. It is very, very rare to find a ward that just keeps growing and growing internally, from new converts and reactivations. Why does growth always stop?

When a branch is just emerging and there are no alternatives, leaders extend callings to people who don’t fit the mold of committed, capable leaders, and they plead with them to assume important responsibility even though they are inexperienced, unconfident and often unworthy. During such periods, the branch and its members grow in exciting ways. I have decided that what causes growth to stop is the emergence of a group of capable, committed,

worthy, experienced leaders emerges in the branch or ward. The question that the leaders in such branches and wards begin to ask is, “Who is best qualified to fulfill this calling?” When there are capable people available to ensure that church programs run efficiently, we often stop drafting people from the periphery of capability into the positions of responsibility in which they can grow. Because they seem less qualified, committed and worthy than those in the experienced core, we leave them on the periphery. The experienced leaders and teachers then begin to play musical chairs, exchanging positions of responsibility. We might call this the “STP syndrome” (Same Ten People). When the same ten people get worn out, then the ward starts to atrophy.

This is not the Lord’s way. Building His Church on the backs of the simple and weak (see D&C 1:19-23) was not a temporary, stop-gap staffing plan to tide the Church over during its early years until enough experienced, committed, qualified leaders had arrived on the scene. The Lord deliberately weakened Gideon’s army so that Israel wouldn’t get confused about whose power had led them to victory (see Judges 6; 7). None of His original Twelve Apostles had evidenced adequate experience or commitment when He called them. Enoch, Moses, Samuel, David, Jeremiah, Amos, and Joseph Smith were unqualified by the world’s standards when the Lord put them to work. But God transformed them, as He did with Saul (see 1 Samuel 10:1–9). Repeatedly I have heard President Hinckley urge in his leadership training meetings, “Take a chance on people. Someone took a chance on you!” His statement, I believe, is often the correct answer to the right question that God wants us to ask: “Are there any among the inexperienced, unworthy and unconverted members that God wants to magnify as they serve in this calling?”

Let me tell you of two men who became great leaders in the church because someone asked the right question. The first is one of the greatest businessmen ever to have lived in Salt Lake City. He was not active in the church as a young married man. When his bishop asked him to serve as the president of the ward YMMIA (Young Men’s President), he said he couldn’t because he smoked. The bishop said that didn’t matter – he needed him to be the YMMIA president, and as long as he didn’t smoke on the stand at church, it would be okay. So this good man accepted this calling. As he served he felt increasingly uncomfortable smoking – fearing that one of the boys might see him. So he quit, and made himself worthy in every way to be a leader of the young men, and of his family. He and his wife raised a family of righteous, magnificent, highly successful children> He served as a patriarch for twenty years.

The next time you go to BYU Hawaii, visit the lobby of the original administration building of the old Church College of Hawaii. There you’ll find the names of Ernie and Doris Skinner. Ernie and Doris bought their home in the Rose Park neighborhood of Salt Lake City just after World War II – just like my parents did. Rose Park had been built within the few years after the war to provide small, affordable “cracker-box” homes to returning GIs. The area sprung to life so quickly, in fact, that when the Rose Park 3rd Ward was organized, there were only 6 temple-recommend-holding men in the ward. My dad was one of them, and was called as counselor to our bishop. There were over 100 less-active men in that ward – an overwhelming home teaching and activation challenge for those few who were fully active and worthy. One day my dad knocked on Ernie Skinner’s door. Ernie was one of those

inactive men. He did not keep the word of wisdom, did not pay tithing, and did not attend church. He was a carpenter. My dad called Ernie to become the president of the Quorum of Inactive Elders in the Rose Park 3rd Ward. Ernie responded that he couldn't, because he wasn't active. My dad said he knew that, but there were no alternatives. They needed Ernie Skinner to become active, and to take responsibility for activating as many of the inactive brethren as he could – otherwise the ward simply couldn't function.. Ernie accepted the call; and asked two of the other inactive men to be his counselors. Within a year the three of them had taken 39 other men in their quorum and their wives to the temple. Ernie was then called on a building mission to build the first Church College of Hawaii campus; and has raised a wonderful, righteous family.

These miracles – wherein God gave men new hearts – occurred because some church leaders didn't ask who was most capable and qualified to do the best job in a calling. Rather, they asked the question God wants to be asked: “Are there any among the inexperienced, unworthy and unconverted members that God wants to magnify as they serve in this calling?”

Dealing with a deluge of baptisms

Some years ago a very baptism-oriented mission president in one of the major cities on the East Coast found a rich vein in which to mine for converts, amongst immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean. He taught the missionaries how to solicit additional referrals from the investigators they were teaching, and they baptized about 700 people within 2 years, in the area bounded by two weak inner-city wards. The leaders of that stake and those wards quite understandably asked the question, “How can we home teach all these people? We can't even home teach our active members, let alone deal with this flood of converts who had limited understanding of the gospel.” Many urged the mission president to back off, because there was just no way to keep all of those people active. Their concerns proved to be well grounded, in fact. As a result, very few of those who were baptized during that deluge are active today. Sacrament meeting attendance in that city has been largely unchanged. The limited number of active members in that ward had all they could do to keep the programs of the church running, let alone do all that needed to be done to keep these new converts active as well.

But let me tell you about another situation, where a comparable number of people were baptized within a two-year period into a much smaller, weaker branch. Nearly all of these remained strong in the faith; and it resulted in a new stake of Zion – just because the leaders asked the right question.

In September 2002, I was assigned to assist Elder Glen L. Pace of the North America Northeast area presidency in reorganizing the presidency of the Augusta Maine Stake. As we sought to learn whom the Lord would have us call as the new stake president, we asked the men we interviewed how they had come to belong to the Church. A startling number gave the same answer: “My parents were baptized into the Farmingdale Branch in 1963 when I was a boy.” After hearing this several times, we inquired what had happened – and were told

that over 450 people had joined the Church in that branch that year; and 190 joined in the next year.

Before the general session of stake conference the next day, I was introduced to an elderly man and his wife in the audience, George and Karlina McLaughlin. George had been president of the Farmingdale Branch at that time, and I subsequently returned to interview the McLaughlins in their home about their experience in leading the branch. George was in failing health, confined now to his bed in their attic bedroom of their humble home in Gardiner, Maine where they raised their eight children. As I listened to their memories, it became clear to me that I was in the presence of two of the humblest but mightiest missionaries in the history of the Church.

Brother and Sister McLaughlin joined the Church in 1951. They attended a branch of ten active members in Litchfield, near Augusta. The branch had grown to about 20 active members by the early 1960s when George was called as branch president, and in 1962 the branch moved to a small building they had built in Farmingdale, another suburb of Augusta. Shortly after the move, George, who drove a milk delivery truck by profession, decided to fast and pray for two days in order to learn from the Lord how he should go about building the Church in the vast area of central Maine that comprised the Farmingdale Branch. On the second day, George pulled his milk truck to the side of a country road and found a secluded spot where he poured out to the Lord his desires to build the Kingdom. As he returned to his truck, he came to understand through the Spirit what he and the members of his branch needed to do.

The following Sunday in a Sacrament Meeting address, George described his plan to the branch members – a talk that Sister McLaughlin recalled as one of the most inspiring and spirit-filled she has ever heard. Following the meeting President McLaughlin called three of the families in the branch to serve as “proselyting families.” Their assignment was for each to bring to another family to the church on the Wednesday evening ten days hence. At that meeting, which George called “U-Night,” he would show a movie about the Church and then give a brief talk that concluded with his testimony. This was to be followed by the missionaries teaching a discussion to each family in their home later that week, and then by the missionaries teaching the next discussion to them at the church during the next Wednesday’s “U-Night.” They were to continue meeting with these families twice each week, once at the church and once in their homes, until the families were baptized or decided not to continue their investigation. In either of those events, the proselyting families would need to find another family to bring to the next U-Night.

When the time of the first U-Night arrived, each of the proselyting families arrived with a family. In the interview I expressed surprise that these families had so faithfully accepted and delivered on this intimidating assignment from their branch president. Karlina explained, “It was because of the talk George gave in Sacrament Meeting.” Each of the families they brought to the U-Night accepted George’s invitation to take the missionary discussions.

When he had met Brother and Sister McLaughlin shortly after arriving in 1963 to preside over the New England Mission, President Truman Madsen told George that if they baptized someone in the Farmingdale Branch, he would like to attend the service. A few weeks after the U-Night process had started, George invited President Madsen to a baptismal service, but President Madsen said that his schedule would not permit it. When George reminded President Madsen of his promise to attend, he countered, “How many are being baptized?” as if to test whether it was worth the three-hour drive from Boston. “I’m not going to tell you,” George replied. “Just come.”

President Madsen walked into the back of the Farmingdale chapel on that Saturday shortly after the baptismal service had started, and he counted 18 people sitting in white clothes waiting to be baptized. Tears came to his eyes. “George, I’ll never see anything like this again in my life,” he said in a hushed voice. “Yes, you will,” was George’s reply.

The next Sunday George called each of these new families to serve as proselyting families as well. Their assignment on the next Wednesday evening was to bring another family, to whom George could show his movie, bear his testimony, and invite to take the missionary lessons. They each accepted the assignment, and brought families, which accepted George’s invitation. When these were baptized George called the to serve as proselyting families as well. The branch members soon had to alter their U-Night format. While the introductory film was being shown in the chapel, each of the missionary discussions was taught in a different classroom in the building – so that if a family had studied the second discussion the prior week in their home, on Wednesday night they went to the room where the third discussion was being taught at the church. That year 451 people were baptized into the Farmingdale Branch; and the next year, 190 people joined.

“With so many people coming into what had been such a tiny branch, how did you keep them in the Church?” I asked.

“We had to teach them how to be Mormons,” was Karline’s reply. “You need to understand who these people were,” she continued. “Most of them were poor and had little schooling.” She and George reminisced about one family that literally lived in a log cabin with rags stuffed in cracks to keep the wind out. “They stayed faithful, and eventually all four of their children graduated from BYU.” These were poignant statements, given that George and Karline themselves had raised their family in that little two-room home with an attic loft.

“My job as branch president was to teach them how to give talks and teach lessons in church. I had to teach them how to teach the gospel to their children. My counselors ran the branch. I trained the new members to become strong members,” George added. “We also had to keep dividing the branch, because the little Farmingdale chapel could only hold 50 – so we kept carving off branch after branch, calling men who had been members for only a few months to be branch presidents. But that’s what we had to do. There were no options.

Karline noted that President Hinckley subsequently gave them a language for what they did to keep these hundreds of new members active. They were brought to the church by

friends, and then they brought friends. They had responsibility. The Sunday after they were baptized they were called as proselyting families – a simple, clear call to bring another family, and then another, and another, to the next U-Night. And they were nourished in the good word of God, as they continued to learn and help teach these concepts again and again while helping their friends study the gospel with the missionaries.

Five years later, in 1968, Elder Harold B. Lee of the Quorum of the Twelve organized the Augusta Maine Stake. Ten of the twelve members of that original high council had been baptized into the Farmingdale branch in 1963-64.

George McLaughlin, whose vision and faith had launched the Church in Maine on this trajectory, was not called to be the stake president or one of his counselors. “Someone came up to us in the congregation and asked if we felt badly not to have been called to lead the stake,” Karlina recalled. George broke in, “I told her that I was quite happy to sit with the people we loved and let others take the lead. That’s why we did it – to bring others to Christ, not to bring any honor to us.”

The contributions of many of the great missionaries in the early days of the restored Church have been broadly published. I was struck that in contrast, one of the greatest missionaries of this dispensation was living the final portion of his noble life unheralded, in that small home in Gardiner, Maine. As we finished our conversation, however, I could sense that the deep spirit of peace that I felt in that room came from angels who were there – patiently waiting so that, whenever the time came, they could escort Brother George McLaughlin, the milk truck driver, to a hero’s welcome in heaven.

Why were George and Karlina McLaughlin able to keep that flood of new converts active, whereas the leaders in that other city plead with the mission president to stanch the flow of new members? I think it is because George and Karlina asked a better question. The Savior helped us frame the right question when he said, “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it.” (Mark 8:35) George and Karlina asked the right question: “How can we help all these people lose their lives for the sake of the Savior?”

We could stay here very late considering other examples to further illustrate the value of asking the right question, before we dash off in pursuit of the answer. May God bless each of us – in our professional lives as well as in our work to build the Kingdom of God, to do this well, and in a way that enables us to get the answer that God would want.

Close with testimony.