

6: Sustaining Those Whom the Lord Sustains

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1. What does it mean to sustain someone?

OED *Sustain*, v. 1. To support the efforts, conduct, or cause of; to succor, support, back up. 3. To keep ... [one] from failing or giving way.

Jeffrey R. Holland: It is no small thing to “sustain” another person. The word literally means to “uphold” or, if you prefer, to “hold up.” When we sustain life, we nourish it, we keep it going. When we sustain a friend or a neighbor or a stranger in the street, we give support, we share strength, we provide help. We hold each other up under the weight of present circumstance. We bear one another’s burdens under the heavy personal pressures of life. (*Ensign*, Nov. 1989)

2. When do we manifest that we sustain leaders?

⁶⁵ No person is to be ordained to any office in this church, where there is a regularly organized branch of the same, without the vote of that church; (D&C 20:65)

3. Those who preside over the Church (GAS)

Joseph Smith did not choose himself to be President of the Church. Neither did any who followed him. ... The appointment comes from our Heavenly Father through His inspiration

This great Church has been presided over by men who have been specially prepared, specially taught, specially equipped for that high honor that has been conferred upon each as he has taken his place. Our Heavenly Father in his wisdom has surrounded these leaders of Israel with others who like themselves have faith and who do not bow to the individual because of his personality or individuality as president of the Church, but who recognize him as the mouthpiece of our Heavenly Father and sustain him and uphold him and pray for him, and love him, in order that they, too, may receive the blessings of our Heavenly Father.

4. What does it mean to sustain the president? (GAS)

A: George Albert Smith was sustained as President of the Church in general conference in October 1945. ... [He said,] “I thank you for the confidence that has been manifested ... in hoping that I may succeed, and promising ... that you will help me to succeed, because I am only a man, one of the humblest among you, but I have been called to this service ... by the authority of our Heavenly Father. ... I will need the help of ... [everyone], not for my blessing, but for your blessing, and for the blessing of the children of men wherever they may be. That is not *my* responsibility, that is *our* responsibility.”

B: Let us sustain these men whom God has raised up to preside over us. Let us bless them, not only by our lips, but by assisting in every possible way to carry this burden that rests so heavily upon their shoulders. ... Pray for and bless them and help them.

C: It does not mean that we will go quietly on our way and be willing that the prophet of the Lord shall direct this work, but it means ... that we will stand behind him; we will pray for him; we will defend his good name, and we will strive to carry out his instructions as the Lord shall direct him to offer them to us while he remains in that position.

D: When I think of the burdens that are carried by the President of this Church and his counselors, and realize the responsibilities that are placed upon their shoulders, with all my heart I desire to help them, that I may not be an encumbrance, but that in the position to which I have been called, with you, my brethren and my sisters, we may each take our place and carry our portion of the load and magnify our calling to the honor and glory of God.

E: I know [the General Authorities] are servants of the Lord, and ... they are seeking to bless mankind. I hope that not any of you ... will fail to sustain them, not only by your faith and prayers but if they are misrepresented ..., that you may be willing and anxious to defend them, if need be, because there is a time coming when they will need your defense. ... Evil men speak evil of them, and good men and good women speak well of them.

F: God grant that we who have been so bountifully blessed may hold up the hands of the servant of the Lord who presides over us; that we may help him not only by our faith and prayers but by loving kindness as opportunity offers; that we may march under the banner that he shall hold aloft as God continues to sustain him as President of the Church, as the prophet of the Lord.

5. Ignoring and criticizing leaders (GAS)

A: There are those ... who have been blinded by the philosophies and foolishness of men. There are those who reject the advice and counsel of the man that God has placed at the head of this Church. ... People who haven’t very much information suddenly come along with a bright idea, and they suggest “this is the way” or “that is the way,” and although it is in conflict with the advice of the Lord some are persuaded to try it. The Lord has given safe advice and appointed the President of his Church to interpret that advice. If we ignore what he advises, as the President of the Church, we may discover that we have made a serious mistake.

B: The Presidency of the Church ... are the representatives of our Heavenly Father. ... We would do well if we would magnify and honor these men he has placed at our head. They are men with human frailties, they will make mistakes, but if we will be as charitable to the mistakes that they make as we are to our own failures and mistakes, we will see their virtues as we see our own. I ... plead with you ... not to permit words of criticism or of unkindness to pass your lips about those whom the Lord has called to lead us. Do not be found in the companionship of those who would belittle them or weaken their influence among the children of men. If you do, I can say to you that you will find yourselves in the power of the adversary.

C: If the members of this Church who find fault with the leaders of the Church and criticize those who are giving their very lives to bless and benefit us would only pause long enough to ask prayerfully, “Which of these teachers is it safe to follow?” they would have no difficulty in finding their right course and would sustain those whom the Lord sustains.

D: [Church members] have prayed for and sustained their leaders ... and during my experience in the Church I have yet to know of one person who has been observing the commandments of the Lord who has raised his or her voice against those who were called to preside over this Church.

6. Who do we covenant to obey?

7. What if we reject God’s counsel given by a servant?

⁶ The thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. ... ⁷ And the Lord said unto Samuel, Harken unto the voice of the people ...: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. (1 Sam 8:6–7)

¹⁴ The day cometh that they who will not hear the voice of the Lord, neither the voice of his servants, neither give heed to the words of the prophets and apostles, shall be cut off from among the people; ¹⁵ For they have strayed from mine ordinances, and have broken mine everlasting covenant; ¹⁶ They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god. (D&C 1:14–16)

8. How can we know a leader's counsel is from God?

Brigham Young: What a pity it would be if we were led by one man to utter destruction! ... I am more afraid that this people have so much confidence in their leaders that they will not inquire for themselves of God whether they are led by [God]. ... Let every man and woman know, by the whispering of the Spirit of God to themselves, whether their leaders are walking in the path the Lord dictates. ... This has been my exhortation continually. (JD 9:150)

Joseph F. Smith (Sept. 3, 1892): No Prophet of God, no Apostle, no President of a Stake, no Bishop, who has had the spirit of his office and calling ..., has ever asked a soul to do anything that they might not know was right and the proper thing to do. ... If we give you counsel, we do not ask you to obey that counsel without you knowing that it is right to do so. But how shall we know that it is right? By getting the Spirit of God in our hearts, by which our minds may be opened and enlightened, that we may know the doctrine for ourselves, and be able to divide truth from error, light from darkness and good from evil. (*Collected Discourses*, Vol. 3)

D. Todd Christofferson: Not every statement made by a Church leader, past or present, necessarily constitutes doctrine. It is commonly understood in the Church that a statement made by one leader on a single occasion often represents a personal, though well-considered, opinion, not meant to be official or binding for the whole Church. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “a prophet [is] a prophet only when he [is] acting as such.” President Clark ... observed: ... “During the excitement incident to the coming of [Johnston’s] Army, Brother Brigham preached to the people in a morning meeting a sermon vibrant with defiance to the approaching army, and declaring an intention to oppose and drive them back. In the afternoon meeting he arose and said that Brigham Young had been talking in the morning, but the Lord was going to talk now. He then delivered an address, the tempo of which was the opposite from the morning talk. ... The Church will know by the testimony of the Holy Ghost in the body of the members, whether the brethren in voicing their views are ‘moved upon by the Holy Ghost’; and in due time that knowledge will be made manifest.” (*Ensign*, Apr 2012)

How did Lehi's sons respond to his dream to leave Jerusalem?

¹²Laman and Lemuel ... did murmur because they knew not the dealings of that God. ... ¹³Neither did they believe that Jerusalem ... could be destroyed according to the words of the prophets. ... ¹⁶I, Nephi, ... did cry unto the Lord; and ... he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words ... spoken by my father; wherefore, I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers. ¹⁷And I spake unto Sam, making known unto him the things which the Lord had manifested unto me by his Holy Spirit. And ... he believed in my words. (1 Ne 2:12–17)

9. When have saints disagreed with modern prophets?

- Joseph Smith.
- Polygamy
- Prohibition amendment
- Blacks and the priesthood
- Gays and Lesbians: Proposition 8 in California
- Political statements: Socialism, government welfare, proper role of government.
- Men called as local leaders.

10. When and how should disagreements be expressed?

Pharisees had many rules of conduct that went beyond the law to create “a hedge around the Law to render its infringement or modification impossible.” Christ taught correct principles and obeyed God’s will (e.g., healed on the Sabbath) even if it was contrary to their rules or teachings. When they found fault with him, he quoted the Law and the Prophets which was the official handbook.

Could there be modern “Pharisees” in the Church teaching rules that go beyond official guidelines? Word of Wisdom, fasting, ...?

Was Jethro sustaining the prophet Moses when he said:

¹⁷ The thing that thou doest *is* not good. ... ¹⁹ Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: ... ²¹ Provide out of all the people able men ... *to be* rulers of thousands, ... hundreds, ... fifties, and ... tens. (Ex 18:17–21)

11. What if we cannot do all we are counseled to do?

12. What if we disagree with a leader's counsel?

13. What if a leader exercises unrighteous dominion?

³⁹ We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion. (D&C 121:39)

Elder Larry Y. Wilson: A month or so after we were married, my wife and I were taking a long road trip in the car. She was driving, and I was trying to relax. I said, “You’re going too fast. Slow down.” My new bride ... replied, “What gives you the right to tell me how to drive?” ... I said, “... because I’m your husband and I hold the priesthood.” Brethren, ... that is *not* the right response. And ... it was the one and only time I ever made that mistake. (*Ensign*, May 2012)

How did his wife respond?

How did her response help him learn to be a good husband?

Quotes

George Albert Smith: The Lord wants us to be happy. That is why he gave us the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is why he conferred the priesthood upon us. He wants us to have joy. That is why he organized this church and set in it the various offices, and all these things are in order. ... If you will follow the leadership of the Lord, and those whom the Lord sustains, you will not fall away into darkness, lose the light, transgress the laws of God, and forfeit your privileges that he is so anxious that all of us should enjoy.

George Albert Smith: There is only one pathway of safety for me in this day and that is to follow those whom the Lord has appointed to lead. I may have my own ideas and opinions, I may set up my own judgment with reference to things, but I know that when my judgment conflicts with the teachings of those that the Lord has given to us to point the way, I should change my course. If I desire salvation I will follow the leaders that our Heavenly Father has given to us, as long as he sustains them.

Sources:

- GAS = George Albert Smith, chapter 6 of lesson manual
- OED = *Oxford English Dictionary*