

In July, we celebrate freedom.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July we celebrate Independence Day, the day that initiated our freedom from the rule of the king of England and the establishment of a nation in which we could be free to worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience (Article of Faith 11).

As members of the church, we believe this freedom was divinely appointed. As recorded in Doctrine & Covenants Section 101, the Lord revealed,

*“Therefore, it is not right that any man should be in bondage one to another. And for this purpose have I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose, ...”*

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of July we commemorate and celebrate the arrival of the pioneers in the valley of the Great Salt Lake and the freedom from oppression and attacks by mobs that was afforded church members as they left Illinois and settled in what would become the state of Utah.

We love freedom. We cherish it.

The love of freedom is in our spiritual DNA. The war in heaven was fought to preserve our freedom. We read in chapter 4 of the Book of Moses,

*“Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him, ..., I caused that he should be cast down;  
And he became Satan, yea, even the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will, ....” (Moses 4:3-4)*

The Lord our God has granted us agency, the freedom to choose for ourselves. Satan and those who follow after him seek to destroy our freedom.

In his April 2015 general conference address, the late Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, said the following:

*“As we walk the path of spiritual liberty in these last days, we must understand that the faithful use of our agency depends upon our having religious freedom.*

He goes on:

“There are four cornerstones of religious freedom that we as Latter-day Saints must rely upon and protect.

- The first is freedom to believe....
- The second ... is the freedom to share our faith and our beliefs with others...
- The third cornerstone of religious liberty is the freedom to form a religious organization, a church, to worship peacefully with others....
- The fourth cornerstone of religious liberty is the freedom to live our faith—free exercise of faith not just in the home and chapel but also in public places.”

We thank God for the religious freedoms we now enjoy. The Church and its members seek to defend and preserve these freedoms. Elder D. Todd Christofferson and many other of our leaders regularly collaborate with others to advocate for the defense of our religious freedoms.

As individuals, you and I may not have great influence over what transpires in the halls of government or in society at large, but we can control what happens in our own individual living spaces. We can live our religions in our homes and create a place where the Spirit of Lord is a welcome guest. At the church transitions to a home-centered, church-supported organization, we can more fully invite the Lord Jesus Christ and His Spirit in our daily lives.

I bear my testimony that God lives.

I know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living Christ.

The Holy Ghost has born witness to me that President Russell M. Nelson is God's chosen prophet for our day.

I bear my testimony that as you partook of the emblems of the body and blood of Christ which were shed for you, you were inviting Christ to renew, to sanctify, and make you clean.

I know that if we will faithfully live our religions in our homes, if we will come unto Christ until the end of your

lives, we will have joy with Him now and in the life to come.

In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.