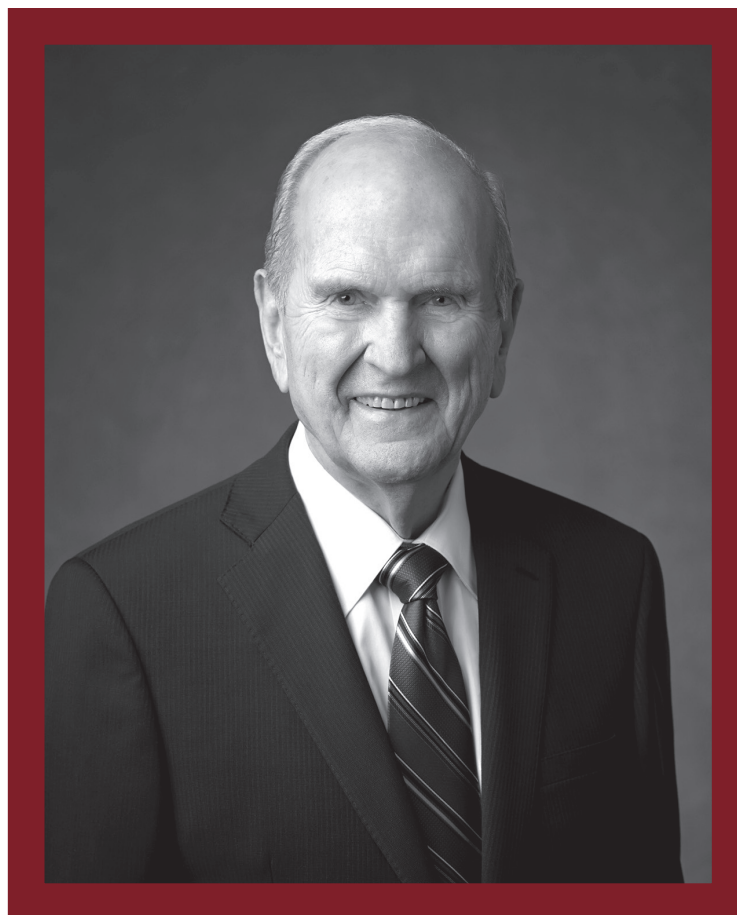




Chapter Seventeen
RUSSELL M. NELSON



LIFE AND TIMES

1924	September 9	Born in Salt Lake City, Utah
1940	November 30	Baptized at age sixteen
1945	August 31	Married Dantzel White in the Salt Lake Temple
1947	August	Graduated from the University of Utah
1947	September	Began PhD at the University of Minnesota
1951–53		Served in the Army Medical Corp during Korean War
1951	December 2	Was ordained a high priest by Elder George Q. Morris of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles
1954		Graduated from the University of Minnesota with a PhD
1955	March	Moved back to Salt Lake City, became faculty member at the University of Utah
1955	November	Performed the first open heart surgery in the state of Utah on Vernell Worthen
1964	December 5	Called as president of the Salt Lake Bonneville Stake
1971	July 2	Set apart as the General Sunday School Superintendent
1972	April 12	Performed open heart surgery on Elder Spencer W. Kimball
1977	March 26	Parents were sealed in the Provo Temple
1984	April 12	Ordained an Apostle
1995	January 29	Daughter, Emily Nelson Wittwer, passed away at age 37
2005	February 12	Dantzel Nelson passed way
2006	April 15	Married Wendy L. Watson
2015	July 15	Set apart as President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles
2018	January 14	Ordained as the 17th President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
2018	April	Priesthood quorums restructured
2018	April	Ministering replaces home and visiting teaching
2018	August	Reemphasis on the correct name of the Church
2018	October	“Home-centered and Church-supported” program announced to begin in January 2019
2018	December	Changes to Primary progression, young men priesthood ordination, and youth temple recommends
2019	January 11	Daughter, Wendy Nelson Maxfield, passed away at age 67

BIOGRAPHICAL HIGHLIGHTS

Russell Marion Nelson was born and raised in Salt Lake City, Utah. He developed a strong work ethic at an early age. He worked many odd jobs, excelled academically and musically, and was involved in student government. His parents, Marion and Edna Nelson, were not active members of the Church during most of Russell's life. In 1977, however, his parents were sealed in the Provo Utah Temple.

Because of his parents' lack of interest in the gospel when he was young, Russell was not baptized into the Church until he was sixteen years old. After graduating from high school early, he attended the University of Utah, where he met Dantzel White from Brigham City, Utah. Russell and Dantzel were married in August 1945, and in 1947, Russell graduated from the University of Utah as a full-fledged medical doctor. He received a PhD from the University of Minnesota and began his professional career as a faculty member in the school of medicine at the University of Utah in 1955. That same year, he performed the first open heart surgery in the state of Utah. Russell became an internationally renowned heart surgeon, traveling the world, presenting his research at conferences, and even performing surgeries in foreign countries.

Despite his professional success, Russell's first love was his family. He and his wife Dantzel raised ten children. Russell was an involved father who made his family his top priority. Russell was also one who devoted his energy to serving in the Church and building the kingdom of God. Before being ordained an Apostle, he served in the youth program, in bishoprics, on a high council, as a stake president, as the General Sunday School President, and as a regional representative.

In April 1984 when Russell was called to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, he was at the apex of his professional career as a heart surgeon. President Nelson has always had a great love for the members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He has blessed Latter-day Saints across the world with his inspiring messages, his kind words, and his personal ministry to so many of our Heavenly Father's children. He has also been instrumental in opening the doors for the gospel of Jesus Christ in many foreign lands across the globe.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Although President Russell M. Nelson has served as the President of the Church for a relatively short time, the contributions during his administration have been monumental and have come at a rapid pace. After some major changes were introduced during the April 2018 general conference, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland stood at the podium and stated, "To paraphrase Ralph Waldo Emerson, the most memorable moments of life are those in which we feel the rush of revelation. President Nelson, I don't know how many more rushes we can handle this weekend." Perhaps Elder Holland's comments capture the feelings of most members of the Church as they process and seek to incorporate the changes that have been announced.

During the priesthood session of the 188th Annual General Conference, President Russell M. Nelson announced that to accomplish the Lord's work more effectively, the high priests group and elders quorum would be merged into one quorum. At the same general conference, "home teaching" and "visiting teaching" were retired. President Nelson then referred to the new approach of caring for members of each ward and branch as "ministering."

Other changes introduced by President Nelson include the following:

- The Church's relationship with the Boy Scouts of America will end beginning December 31, 2019.
- New guidelines for youth interviews have been announced.
- The wording and length of the endowment ceremony in the temple have been adjusted.
- The Latter-day Saint hymnbook and *Children's Songbook* are being altered to meet the needs of a growing, international Church. Furthermore, members have been asked to contribute to the changes.
- In some parts of the world, mission calls will be posted online instead of through the postal service.
- Beginning in January 2020, seminary students will study the same book of scripture as the general Church membership. The study topic will be aligned with *Come, Follow Me*.

- The Mormon Tabernacle Choir has changed their name to The Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square.
- Many major Church pageants will be discontinued, except for Nauvoo, Mesa, and the British Pageant.
- Sister missionaries can now wear pants instead of dresses.
- Beginning in January 2019, children will complete primary and begin attending Sunday School, Young Men's, and Young Women's. These changes are now based on age groups, not as individual birthdays. Additionally, young men are eligible to be ordained to a priesthood office in January of the year they turn twelve, fourteen, or sixteen. For the first time in the history of the Church, there are eleven-year-old deacons and eleven-year old youth attending the temple.

Perhaps one of those most significant cultural changes was announced at the October 2018 General Conference. Beginning in January 2019, the three-hour church block was reduced to two hours. Sacrament meetings are now sixty minutes in length. Sunday School is held on the first and third Sundays of each month, and priesthood quorums, Young Women's, and Relief Society have their meetings on the second and fourth Sundays.

Another significant emphasis has been on the name of the Church. On August 16, 2018, it was announced that the Church should be referred to by its proper name—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Terms such as “LDS” or “Mormon” are now discouraged. Although attempts to make this course correction have fallen short in the past, President Nelson explained emphatically that the Lord is not pleased when we refer to the Church by any other name. In fact, he said, “When we discard the Savior's name, we are subtly disregarding all that Jesus Christ did for us—even his Atonement.”

Certainly, there will be more changes to come. President Nelson told the *Church News* in November 2018, “If you think the Church has been fully restored, you're just seeing the beginning. There's much more to come.” As President Nelson continues to receive revelation, more changes will come to the Church and its members. Our Prophet is determined to do all that he can to prepare the world for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

TEACHINGS

Before being ordained as the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, President Russell M. Nelson served as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles for nearly thirty-four years. During that time, he delivered close to seventy major addresses during general conferences, and twenty addresses at Brigham Young University. Of course, he has delivered many additional messages at stake conferences and regional conferences across the world.

Besides speaking, President Nelson has been a prolific author, writing several books, including *Accomplishing the Impossible*, *The Power within Us*, *The Gateway We Call Death*, *Perfection Pending*, *The Magnificence of Man*, and *Hope in Our Hearts*. In 1979, Brother Nelson published his own autobiography, entitled *From Heart to Heart*. Russell wrote this book at the urging of his wife Dantzel and from President Spencer W. Kimball.

For over thirty-five years, President Nelson has inspired the general Church membership with his messages. Topics that he has addressed include the plan of salvation, the Atonement of Jesus Christ, the Book of Mormon, missionary work, the temple, marriage, family, ministering, women's roles, decisions, faith, the Sabbath day, prayer, the scriptures, covenants, and a host of others. Many of President Nelson's teachings have been recently published in *Teachings of Russell M. Nelson*.

President Nelson is a gifted speaker, addressing topics with candor, love, and encouragement. Many have been inspired by his messages that center on the plan of salvation—especially dealing with the death of loved ones. President Nelson has been transparent in his messages, as he has shared his poignant feelings about losing two of his daughters to cancer and his beloved wife Dantzel.

President Nelson has never shied away from difficult topics. He has always been a defender of the faith, and of the family. His messages have lifted the membership of the Church to greater heights and inspired them to do better and to become more devoted disciples of Jesus Christ.

LIFE OF RUSSELL M. NELSON

President Russell M. Nelson was born to Marion C. Nelson and Edna Anderson Nelson. Marion and Edna were married by their bishop Elias S. Woodruff on August 25, 1919. The next year, their first child, Marjory, was born. Five years later, on September 9, 1924, Edna Nelson gave birth to a nine-pound, eleven-ounce baby boy. It was miraculous that a five-foot, three-inch mother could deliver such a large baby. They named their baby boy Russell Marion Nelson. In a general conference, President Nelson explained, “I also owe so much to my forebears. All eight of my great-grandparents were converts to the Church in Europe. Each of these stalwart souls sacrificed everything to come to Zion. During subsequent generations, however, not all my ancestors remained so committed. As a result, I was not raised in a gospel-centered home.”¹ Although Marion and Edna were not active members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, President Nelson reported:

They made love the prevailing influence in their home. Completely absent were expressions of anger, criticism, and denigration of others. Our parents led, guided, and provided; but they were not possessive, and they did not unduly interfere in the lives of their children. The important decisions in life—choice of career, selection of marriage partner, and all other opportunities—were to be made individually, after parental counsel.²

However, as Russell grew up, he knew that there was something missing from his life—something big. He explained in a general conference:



An infant Russell, between 4 and 7 months old.

I adored my parents. They meant the world to me and taught me crucial lessons. I cannot thank them enough for the happy homelife they created for me and my siblings. And yet, even as a boy, I knew I was missing something. One day I jumped on the streetcar and went to an LDS bookstore to find a book about the Church. I loved learning about the gospel.

As I came to understand the Word of Wisdom, I wanted my parents to live that law. So, one day when I was very young, I went to our basement and smashed on the concrete floor every bottle of liquor! I expected my father to punish me, but he never said a word.

As I matured and began to understand the magnificence of Heavenly Father's plan, I often said to myself, "I don't want one more Christmas present. I just want to be sealed to my parents."³

Russell was blessed with a strong and faithful home teacher named Jonas Ryser. Brother Ryser convinced Marion and Edna that their children should be baptized, and they eventually granted their permission. On November 30, 1940, sixteen-year-old Russell was baptized by his good friend Foley C. Richards and confirmed the following day by Brother Ryser. Russell then was warmly welcomed into the ward by his bishop at the time, Sterling W. Sill. Fifty-four years later, as an Apostle, Elder Russell M. Nelson spoke at the funeral of Bishop Sill.⁴ Bishop Sill ordained Russell to the office of priest in the Aaronic Priesthood on November 9, 1941, when Russell was seventeen years old, and on April 30, 1944, Bishop Joseph W. Bambrough ordained Russell an elder.⁵

Russell was always a hard worker, and his drive to excel has never left him. He began working at the age of ten as an errand boy for his father's advertising agency. Since then, he has never been without a job. He was later employed as a bank teller and then a mail sorter, and he held each of these jobs before he graduated from high school.⁶

However, other endeavors would fill Russell's time besides working for pay. He spent many hours playing the piano. He served as both the student body vice president and president at Roosevelt Junior High School. He also starred in school plays; was a member of the glee club; was involved in choir, where he sang with perfect pitch; and had his own dark room in the basement of their home,

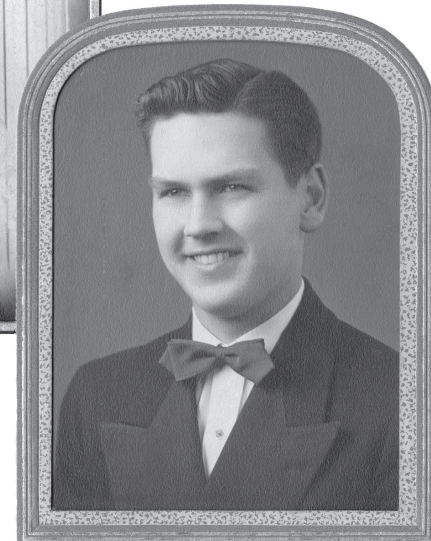
where he developed his interest in photography. He even played on the high school football team.⁷ "Although Russell was successful in other activities, his football coach usually kept him on the bench during games. 'I think one of the reasons was that I always felt a little bit defensive about my hands,' he remembers. 'I was afraid somebody might step on them with their cleated shoes.' Those hands operated on the coach nearly forty years later."⁸

RUSSELL, DANTZEL, AND FAMILY

Dantzel was born on February 17, 1926, in Perry, Utah, to LeRoy Davis White and Maude Clark White. Dantzel was voted "Outstanding Senior Girl" at Box Elder High School and then attended the University of Utah on a scholarship.⁹ She was a gifted singer with a beautiful soprano voice. Russell's and Dantzel's lives intersected when they met at



Dantzel White during her senior year at Box Elder High School, spring of 1941.



Russell in the University of Utah yearbook, 1942.

the University of Utah during Russell's sophomore year in 1942.¹⁰ Some of Russell's friends tried to persuade him to try out for a university musical, *Hayfoot, Strawfoot*. Russell's response to the pressure of his friends was resistance. He said, "I was more concerned about passing biology than about being in some play."¹¹ On April 16, 1942,¹² Russell reluctantly attended the first rehearsal with his nose buried in a book. However, when he heard the soprano voice of a dark-haired young woman, he asked the director, "Who is that beautiful girl singing up there?" The director responded, "That's Dantzel White. She's the one you'll be performing with." Russell recalled, "I thought she was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen and sensed that she was the one I would marry." Russell then added, "That was a strange feeling, because at the time I was really not all that interested in such serious thoughts. I enjoyed dating many different girls and was concerned about pursuing my desired goal of preparing for medical school. I was only seventeen years of age, and marriage was the farthest thing from my mind."¹³

When they met, Dantzel was only sixteen years old. Nevertheless, when she went home to Perry, Utah, a short

time later, she announced to her parents that she had met the man she hoped to marry.¹⁴ After three years of courtship, Russell and Dantzel were married in the Salt Lake Temple on August 31, 1945.¹⁵ Dantzel was accepted to attend the Julliard School of Music in New York City, but she turned the offer down to marry Russell and begin their family.¹⁶ Russell observed, "In making the decision to marry me, she ultimately exchanged a promising future in music for the privilege of singing lullabies to her little ones in a rocker and cradle."¹⁷ Russell and Dantzel would continue to make sacrifices throughout their lives to bless their family and build the kingdom of God.



Russell and Dantzel as a couple while attending the University of Utah.



Russell and Dantzel in the fall of 1944, before their wedding.



Russell and Dantzel on their honeymoon at the Grand Canyon, on the hike to Angels Widow, September 3-5, 1945.



May 1945, at Dantzel's sister's home in Sugarhouse, UT.

“Then in 1945, the break came that made our marriage possible. My application for the V-12 Program of the United States Naval Reserve was accepted! This meant that I would continue through medical school as an apprentice seaman in the Navy, while they would finance my tuition and books and give me a salary (as apprentice seaman) which I recall was around \$125 a month. That paved the way for us, at least in part, to become financially solvent enough to proceed with our marriage” (*From Heart to Heart*, 51).

August 29, 1947. Russell graduated from the University of Utah at the top of his class with a doctor's degree, just before he and Dantzel moved to Minnesota.



Russell and Dantzel on September 5, 1947

According to Spencer J. Condie, “Following Russell's graduation from medical school, he and Dantzel stuffed all the belongings they could into a two-door, blue Chevrolet that his parents had purchased for them. In September 1947, they drove to Minneapolis, Minnesota, where Russell was to begin an internship at the University of Minnesota Hospitals” (Condie, 105).

FAMILY RITUALS

Before they had children, Russell and Dantzel found themselves having a poignant conversation in the north woods of Minnesota. Russell remembered, “We asked ourselves whether we wanted children, and if so, how many? We each timidly felt out the other’s attitudes on that question. But after we had explored it a bit, we both came to the conclusion that an even dozen would do! I don’t know how serious we really were at that time; we were so young and naïve.”¹⁸

Russell and Dantzel did not have the twelve children they thought they would have, but they did have ten: Marsha, Wendy, Gloria, Brenda, Sylvia, Emily, Laurie, Rosalie, Marjorie, and Russell. Dantzel found a way to run

the large Nelson household smoothly and efficiently. When asked how President Nelson accomplished everything that he did, being a stake president, surgeon, husband, father, and even a missionary on Temple Square during his prime parenting years, his daughter Sylvia responded, “One word: ‘Mother.’”¹⁹ Dantzel was supportive, never complained, and absolutely loved being a mother.

President Russell M. Nelson has many gifts, talents, and abilities, but perhaps one of his greatest strengths is his devotion to family. The first time President Spencer W. Kimball saw the Nelson family was at a stake conference in 1964. He said, “Eight daughters were singing a song, accompanied by their mother, Dantzel. I was amazed and pleased, and I thought, ‘What a perfect family! What beautiful parents!’



Nelson family photo, April 1978.

Front: Rosalie, Brenda, Russell Jr., Sylvia, Marsha, Laurie.
Back: Marjorie, Emily, Russell, Dantzel, Gloria, Wendy.

And what delightful children to grow up in one household.' I have known them from that time forward, and now there are nine daughters and one son. Brother Nelson has always been a family man first."²⁰

Most evenings, Dantzel and the children would straighten up the house before Russell walked in the door at about 5:30 or 6:00 p.m., after a full day of work. When he came home, Russell would often turn off the television and then find Dantzel and give her a hug and a kiss. It was not unusual for Russell to say to his daughters, "Do you know how much I love your mother?"²¹ On other occasions, he would say to his children, "Look how beautiful your mother looks tonight."²² Once Dantzel was greeted affectionately, Russell would then locate each of his children and likewise greet them with verbal and physical affection.

President Nelson has always had the ability to focus on the task at hand, devoting his heart and soul to whatever needs to be done. His daughter Sylvia explained, "When he's at work, he's 100 percent at work. When he's home, he's 100 percent at home. When he's doing his Church duty, he's 100 percent Church duty. I think maybe that's how he balances things."²³ When Russell was at work, he was able to devote all of his time and energy to his patients. However, when he was home, he was able to change gears and focus solely on his family. Perhaps Russell's children were not aware of the many balls he juggled—including being a surgeon and stake president. What the Nelson children did know was that their

Singing to the Baby

Often, Russell's work in the hospital kept him near his patients until late in the evening. Even when Russell arrived home late at night, he still liked to connect with everyone in the family. On many late evenings, he would walk into the door and still greet Dantzel and the children affectionately. Gloria reported that after her mom had put a baby to bed, her father would often arrive home late at night, find the sleeping baby, take the baby out of the crib, and "nuzzle his nose into their neck and sing to them."¹ One song he loved to sing was "Daddy's Little Girl." Russell was determined to stay connected to his family, no matter how busy his schedule was.

father loved them and made time for them. The Nelsons' daughter Emily captured something that perhaps each of their children could say: "I never felt Dad was too busy for me. . . . We spent lots of time together."²⁴ Despite his demanding and often unpredictable schedule, the Nelson children did not sense that their father was too busy for them or that they were neglected because of his heavy Church responsibilities.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

As often as he could, Russell tried to give Dantzel some relief by taking their children out of the home and engaging them in some constructive play activities. On Saturdays, after the chores were done, he would often take his children to local swimming pools, ice-skating rinks, parks, the Deseret Gym, the tennis club, or even to a local park.²⁵

When he was home, Russell was not one to relax and unwind in front of the television set after a long and stressful day as a surgeon. He was a dedicated husband and father, helping Dantzel with the dinner and dishes and assisting their children with homework and projects. Ever efficient, Russell even concocted



**The Nelson family, Summer 1964,
performing at the Bonneville Stake.**

an ingenious way to bathe the children. Often he would put four of his daughters in the bathtub at the same time. “Russell would pour water and a dab of shampoo on each little girl’s head and then have them massage each other’s scalps until he gave the command, ‘About face.’ Then, amid giggles and great glee, the girls would turn around in the tub and begin to shampoo the hair of the sister who had just been working on them. The shampoo train was an elementary lesson on the Golden Rule.”²⁶

One of Russell’s favorite hobbies was snow skiing. Throughout the lives of his children, and even grandchildren, President Nelson has believed that a *family that skis together stays together*. Spencer J. Condie observed, “Russell has never taken for granted the blessing of living close enough to the ski slopes that he can work a good forenoon and be on the lift at 1 p.m., ski until 4:30 p.m., and then return home to enjoy dinner with the family.”²⁷ He has taught his children and grandchildren how to snow ski—sometimes five children at a time! Often, he would pull one or two of his children out of school and take them up to the resort for some afternoon skiing. This was a great stress reliever for Russell, and it provided a way for him to stay connected with his children. After he was called as an Apostle, Mondays became family ski day.



Skiing is still a Nelson family tradition. Park City, winter 2017.



RIGHTEOUS TRADITIONS

Although the Nelsons knew how to have fun, they also knew how to worship the Lord. Russell and Dantzel built their home on the foundation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Righteous traditions became the reinforcing bars that held the foundation in place. Once, President Harold B. Lee asked Dantzel what it was like to be married to a man who was extremely busy with Church callings and professional responsibilities. Dantzel responded, “When he’s home, he’s home.”²⁸ Russell understood the depth and significance of a principle that President Lee had taught: “The most important of the Lord’s work you will ever do will be within the walls of your own homes.”²⁹ Dantzel then added, “At home, he devotes his whole attention to us. . . . Rather than watching TV, he helps with the meals and the dishes, helps the children with their homework, and reads to them before they go to bed. And the two of us regularly enjoy time alone together.”³⁰

Besides being an involved father, Russell was a wonderful husband, always in tune to Dantzel’s needs. He understood that to be an effective mother, Dantzel would need occasional breaks. Thursdays became Dantzel’s days to do whatever she wanted to. On Thursday mornings, she would volunteer at the LDS Hospital. Dantzel also became a member of the Tabernacle Choir in 1967. Her choir rehearsals were on Thursday evenings. On those evenings, Russell “arranged his schedule . . . so he could be home with the children that night.”³¹ He was not sitting in a recliner watching television while the children were left to fend for themselves. He was actively involved in making dinner, cleaning the kitchen, helping the children with their homework and projects, and assisting them in getting prepared for the next day of school.

Every morning, after Russell’s own individual religious practices, he and Dantzel would engage in consistent religious practices with their family. Daily scripture reading began at 6:30 a.m. Family prayer was at 6:45 a.m., at each meal, and at 10:00 p.m.³² Russell had the ability to teach his children at their age level. His daughter Gloria remembered that while he and Dantzel were reading from the scriptures with their older children, Russell also read *Book of Mormon Stories* to

Attending Medical Conferences with His Children

From 1960 to 1978, Russell attended over 165 medical conferences or meetings. Russell took his children with him to those conferences thirty-six times (22 percent of his conferences), and Dantzel traveled with him thirty-five times (21 percent of his conferences). Between 1972 and 1978, Russell traveled thirty-two times in his calling as General Sunday School President of the Church. Russell took his children with him to Church events or conferences twelve times (38 percent of his conferences), and Dantzel accompanied him eleven times (34 percent of his conferences). There is no question that Russell M. Nelson enjoyed being with his family and wanted them to enjoy some of the experiences in travel that he was enjoying. Traveling became a way for Russell and his family to connect and stay bonded together.

the younger children—especially to young Russell.³³ The Nelsons also enjoyed having weekly family home evenings and attending church together. Music was also an important part of their lives. The beautiful sound of not only singing but also instruments such as the piano, violin, guitar, accordion, cello, trumpet, and flute filled the home.³⁴

A righteous tradition that Russell began, with Dantzel's encouragement, was taking their children with him to medical conferences. As a busy surgeon, Russell was often gone 25–30 percent of the year attending meetings. To remedy his loneliness, one—or sometimes two—of his children would often accompany him. Having his family travel with him “kept him from getting lonesome for his loved ones, gave him a chance to listen to their problems and hopes, and provided him and family members with an opportunity to talk to each other and share ideas and experiences. The selection of which child got to go on which trip was not based on rotation but rather on which child most needed a trip with daddy.”³⁵ President Nelson recalled, “Those trips gave me a chance to listen to their problems and their ambitions . . . and for us simply to talk to one another and share ideas and experiences with each other.”³⁶

Gloria remembers attending one medical conference with her father and her sister Brenda. On another occasion, Russell took Gloria with him on a trip to see where the Washington D.C. Temple was being built. Since Gloria was born in Washington, DC, that trip was a special experience for her. She also remembered a conference she attended with her father in Little Rock, Arkansas. On another trip to Denver, Gloria was excited that she and her father were able to tour the Air Force Academy together.³⁷ Sylvia remembered

attending a medical conference in New York City. She vividly recalled eating lasagna, one of her father's favorite meals, with him at a nice Italian restaurant and attending the opera, another one of President Nelson's favorite things to do.³⁸

Once, Russell was boarding an airplane with one of his daughters when he noticed that Elder Mark E. Petersen of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles was on the flight. Russell felt uncomfortable, so he “explained to Elder Petersen that his daughter was accompanying him to a professional meeting, adding apologetically that taking her along might be a bit extravagant. Elder Petersen responded, ‘Extravagant? No Brother Nelson, it's a wise investment.’”³⁹

Such investments were the kinds Russell and Dantzel most often pursued. They did not spend their money on extravagant cars or other material possessions, but they did invest their resources in spending time with their children. The payoff from their investment of time with their family continues to pay dividends today. Russell learned the significance of Elder Petersen's comment as his children grew older. He said:

I've lived to see a number of my professional colleagues regret the misdeeds of their youngsters. They've spent infinitely more money than I ever did on transportation and hotels as they have been required to pay fines, psychiatrist's fees, and other heavy penalties for the disobedience of their children to the laws of God and man. I've never had that experience. Aside from their receiving occasional parking tickets, there has never been a moment when one of our children ever gave me grief or cause for concern. Of course, I don't really

credit this great blessing entirely to the occasional trips the children have taken with their dad. I'm sure the greatest share of the credit goes to their mother and to the fact that we have always reared our children in the knowledge of the Lord and his doctrines. Nonetheless, the privilege of having one or more of the family with me on my trips has been the spoonful of sugar that's helped the medicine go down—the medicine of continuing medical education that took me away from my family and loved ones while in the pursuit of excellence, that they, as well as I, might be proud of the quality of work I was doing.⁴⁰

Despite his advancing age and global Church responsibilities, President Nelson continues to send handwritten birthday, Christmas, and anniversary cards to each member of his family—whether they be a child, grandchild, or great-grandchild.⁴¹ When his grandchildren and great-grandchildren are born, he visits them in the hospital. He also attends as many of his grandchildren's and great-grandchildren's⁴² blessings, baptisms, and temple weddings as he can. Every month, the Nelson family gathers and celebrates all of the birthdays and anniversaries of their family members for that particular month. It is not unusual to have over 150 family members in attendance.⁴³ President Nelson makes sure that he visits and connects with everyone present during these gatherings. He is always trying to expand his circle of love.⁴⁴

Russell once wrote, “Dantzel and I desire each one in our family to join with us in the eternal perpetuation of our family unit. If just one is missing, our joy will be incomplete.”⁴⁵ President Nelson also taught, “Our family is the focus of our greatest work and joy in this life; so it will be throughout all eternity.”⁴⁶ Nothing was more important on this earth for Russell and Dantzel than their family, and today nothing is more important for Russell and Wendy than their growing family. This has been demonstrated repeatedly not only by what Russell has said but also by what he has done.

EARLY CHURCH SERVICE

Throughout his adult life, Russell has always been willing to serve in the Church and build the kingdom of God. In fact, Church service has given him much joy and satisfaction, and in some ways it became an outlet from the busy demands of medicine. We do not know much about Russell's Church callings from 1941, when he enrolled at the University of Utah, until 1947, when he and Dantzel moved to Minneapolis. What we do know is that serving a mission was not an option for him because of World War II and his enrollment in medical school.⁴⁷

“There was never a time that Russell complained or said one derogatory remark about a leader in the Church. . . . There was never a time when a Church calling was refused or when Russell asked to be released from a Church calling.”⁴⁸ Both Russell and Dantzel served in Church callings in Minneapolis; Washington, DC; Boston; and eventually Salt Lake City.

Early Church Callings

- Minneapolis years (1947–1951, 1954–1955)—Minneapolis Branch Sunday School superintendency²
- Washington, DC, years (1951–1953)—second counselor in the bishopric of the Washington Ward; ordained a high priest at the age of twenty-seven on December 27, 1951³
- Boston years (1953–1954)—secretary of the adult Aaronic Priesthood⁴; Dantzel was in the Relief Society presidency of the Cambridge Branch⁵
- Salt Lake City years (1955–1984)—priests quorum advisor in the Garden Park Ward,⁶ superintendency of the Bonneville Stake YMMIA,⁷ second counselor in the bishopric of the Garden Park Ward,⁸ alternate high councilor in the Bonneville Stake,⁹ stake president in the Bonneville Stake,¹⁰ general Sunday School superintendent,¹¹ regional representative¹²