

“To Be Spiritually Minded Is Life and Peace”

JOSÉ A. TEIXEIRA

Our family, in particular our children, who have graduated from this university feel grateful for the lessons they learned here that helped them prepare for these unique times in which we live now.

The Merriam-Webster online dictionary reported that, by the end of 2020, based on an analysis of words looked up in their online dictionary, the Word of the Year for 2020 was *pandemic*.

The first big spike in dictionary lookups for pandemic took place on February 3rd, the same day that the first COVID-19 patient in the U.S. was released from a Seattle hospital. That day, pandemic was looked up 1,621% more than it had been a year previous, but close inspection of the dictionary data shows that searches for the word had begun to tick up consistently starting on January 20th, the date of the first positive case in the U.S.

. . . That initial February spike in lookups didn't fall off—it grew. By early March, the word was being looked up an average of 4,000% over 2019 levels. . . .

On March 11th, the World Health Organization officially declared “that COVID-19 can be characterized as a pandemic,” and this is the day that pandemic saw the single largest spike in dictionary traffic in 2020, showing an increase of 115,806% over lookups on that day in 2019. What is most striking about this word is that it has remained high in [searches in the dictionary] ever since, staying near the top of our word list for the [rest of the year]. . . .

[According to Merriam-Webster, the word *pandemic*] is defined as: “an outbreak of a disease that occurs over a wide geographic area (such as multiple countries or continents) and typically affects a significant proportion of the population.”

The Greek roots of this word tell a clear story: *pan* means “all” or “every,” and *dēmos* means “people”; its literal meaning is “of all the people.”¹

José A. Teixeira, a member of the Presidency of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, delivered this devotional address on February 9, 2021.

In one way or another, all of us were affected by this unexpected outbreak and medical emergency. Words and expressions rarely used before became part of our day-to-day vocabulary, such as

- Lockdowns
- Social distancing
- Isolation
- Quarantine
- Flattening the curve
- Personal protective equipment (or PPE)
- And many others

Our lives were transformed during this last year with these unexpected challenges. The current pandemic of COVID-19 is of such a magnitude that most people alive today have never seen anything like it. Loss of life was and still is a painful topic for so many. Working conditions required a significant amount of change, as did our day-to-day interactions with each other.

Students and faculty were not an exception to all of this, as you well know. The “Gallup State of the Student Experience: Fall 2020 Report” revealed that “80% of first-time students in the fall of 2020 rate the quality of education they are receiving as ‘excellent’ or ‘very good,’” but of those already enrolled, “51% [more than half] . . . report that COVID-19 is ‘very likely’ or ‘likely’ to impact their ability to complete their degree.”²

Although the majority of the students reported positive overall ratings, students who were taking classes mostly or entirely in person before the pandemic and who had transitioned to a mostly or entirely online experience said the quality of their educational experience was affected.³

Dealing with change and knowing what to do in troubled times is one of the extraordinary blessings of being a faithful member of the Lord’s Church. The gift of the Holy Ghost is the privilege—given to people who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ, been baptized, and been confirmed as members of the Church—to receive continual guidance and inspiration from the Holy Ghost as they remain faithful.

I personally cannot think of a more sublime blessing than having the constant companionship and guidance of the Holy Ghost and being able

to receive comfort, peace, and direction from Him in our lives.

Choosing to Be Spiritually Minded

For a moment, I invite you to consider these words of the apostle Paul to the Romans: “To be spiritually minded is life and peace.”⁴

Choosing to be spiritually minded by living a life worthy of the Holy Ghost’s gentle persuasions will provide you guidance in your decisions and protection from both physical and spiritual danger. Through the Holy Ghost, you can receive gifts of the Spirit for your benefit and for the benefit of those you love and serve. His communication to your spirit carries far more certainty than any communication you can receive through your natural senses.

How can you live a spiritually minded life and have more abundant guidance from the Holy Ghost?

To be in tune with our Heavenly Father and our Lord and Savior is being spiritually minded.

The scriptures teach us that all things are spiritual unto the Lord: “Wherefore, verily I say unto you that all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal.”⁵ When we are in harmony with Heavenly Father, we have the companionship of His Spirit. As we place that harmony as a priority in our lives, we draw near unto Him and unto His Son, Jesus Christ, whom He has sent, and not unto the world.

To love God is to be spiritually minded.

Cultivating a relationship with your Heavenly Father in prayer will keep Him in your mind and in your heart.

The apostle John, one of the original Twelve and accredited author of the first book of John in the New Testament, addressed false beliefs amongst the people of the time that salvation was achieved by means other than through faith in Jesus Christ. John refuted these false beliefs with his testimony of the love of God for us and with his personal witness of Jesus Christ, and John invited his readers to experience the joy of being in harmony with the Father and the Son.⁶ He said, “And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.”⁷

John also said:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

*And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.*⁸

In this life, we can feel the love of God with the companionship of His Spirit. When we do the will of our Father in Heaven and strive to stay on the path that leads us to Him, the Holy Ghost can guide us.⁹

We are spiritually minded when we understand that the purpose of the sacrament is to remember the Savior and what He did for us. The promise in both the prayers of the bread and the water contain the phrase “that they [who partake] may . . . have his Spirit to be with them.”¹⁰ We endeavor to take the sacrament every week because we want to preserve and nurture our spirituality.

We could use Matthew’s words in the New Testament as a measuring instrument, or perhaps a position sensor, to indicate where we stand regarding our spirituality: “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”¹¹

President Dallin H. Oaks taught:

*As faithful members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we have a distinctive way of looking at life. We view our experiences in terms of eternity. As we draw farther from worldliness, we feel closer to our Father in Heaven and more able to be guided by his Spirit. We call this quality of life **spirituality**. . . .*

[Elder Oaks then specified:] *How we **interpret** our experiences is also a function of our degree of spirituality. Some interpret mortality solely in terms of worldly accomplishments and possessions. In contrast, we who have a testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ should interpret our experiences in terms of our knowledge of the purpose of life, the mission of our Savior, and the eternal destiny of the children of God.*¹²

To recognize spiritual things is to be spiritually minded. I attest that spirituality is a blessing of

consistent effort on our part. As we seek to learn and follow the promptings of the Spirit, we can more easily distinguish things of God from things of the world.

Elder Quentin L. Cook reminded us of this when he said, “Just as repetition and consistent effort are required to gain physical or mental capacity, the same is true in spiritual matters.”¹³

How Are You Developing Your Spirituality?

We have seen many of you decisively and courageously change your routines during this pandemic: tending to others’ needs, connecting more meaningfully with family, being more understanding and kind, serving in your community, and dedicating time to be in tune with the things of God. I commend you for working to be spiritually minded in these ways.

Thanks to the foresight of Church leaders, we have many excellent tools today to assist in strengthening our spirituality. Think about the development of the Gospel Library app that allows the power of scriptures and gospel study to literally be in your pocket at all times. Think about ministering and the changes therein that encourage the use of technology as we reach out to others. Consider the home-centered, Church-supported approach to learning and the *Come, Follow Me* curriculum, which can elevate our spirituality wherever we are.

We do not need to be in a spiritual quarantine with all these resources available!

We can work together, choosing every opportunity to be spiritually minded, encouraging life and peace as Paul described, and consciously inviting spirituality in as an integral part of our lives. We are taught in the scriptures that “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, [and] temperance.”¹⁴ So let us seek this quality of life.

Are You Making and Keeping Spiritual Goals?

A spiritually minded person endeavors to strengthen his or her spirituality and, when setting goals, asks this question: Are my goals giving adequate attention to my spiritual needs?

A spiritually minded person seeks to know how to follow spiritual promptings and how to

act on those promptings. Therefore, goal setting for spiritual things is necessary and essential.

Annie, our four-year-old granddaughter, set a goal to learn to ride a bicycle. She practiced and caught on quickly, so her parents took her on a family bicycle ride to the lake near their house. There were a few hills and a few bumps along the path, but Annie did great!

While they were riding, Annie’s mother expressed amazement at how well Annie had biked up a hill and across a bridge.

Annie shared the secret for her success, replying, “Yep. I just hold on, Mom, and keep pedaling.”

And with that simple, consistent effort, she rode two miles on her very first real bicycle ride. My wise granddaughter knows what it takes to conquer any hill or ride over any bump. We just have to hold on and keep pedaling.

While riding a bicycle, if we *only* hold on, no matter how tight, we are still likely to fall. It is the pedaling that maintains the balance.

For us, it is the simple daily acts of prayer, scripture study, and application of the prophet’s counsel that keep our spirituality upright and moving forward, despite the bumps, hills, pandemics, and changes of life.

Our dear prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, explained that “as you choose to let God prevail in your lives, you will experience for yourselves that our God is ‘a God of miracles.’”¹⁵

President Nelson also said:

*When your greatest desire is to let God prevail, to be part of Israel, so many decisions become easier. So many issues become nonissues! . . . You know what you want to accomplish. You know the kind of person you really want to become.*¹⁶

I suggest focusing on what really matters. In doing so, you will see that strengthening your spirituality and becoming a spiritually minded person, though it requires effort and diligence, can be simple. **Hold on and keep pedaling!**

Nurture Your Spiritual Liahona

You are nudged, poked, and pulled in so many directions by so many voices of this world—in which everyone seems to know how you can attain

happiness and find comfort—that at times you might feel hesitant about which direction you should go.

Remember that your spiritual Liahona works best when you practice differentiating the voice of the Spirit from the voices of the world. The Holy Ghost is always calm, clear, and comforting and gives specific guidance to bring you peace and hope. The Holy Ghost works in perfect unity with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, fulfilling several roles to help you live righteously and receive the blessings of the gospel.

One of the many teachings I love from President Russell M. Nelson is this lesson:

*The source of our spiritual power is the Lord! The ultimate source of spiritual power is God our Father. The messenger of this power is the Holy Ghost. This power differs from electrical power. An electrical appliance **consumes** power. The use of His spiritual power **replenishes** our power. While electrical power can be used only for measured **periods** of time, spiritual power can be used for time and **eternity!**¹⁷*

We are encouraged to “seek learning, even by study and also by faith,”¹⁸ and receive the promise of revealed truth to our minds and hearts through the Holy Ghost if we will diligently seek Him.¹⁹

My dear friends, I invite you to hold on and keep pedaling to become spiritually minded by setting goals in your life for spiritual things. Use the many resources made available to you to strengthen your spirit. After all, we are spiritual beings having a human experience—not the other way around.

BYU is an exceptional university because it was founded on the premise that here you can learn and develop your gifts and talents and prepare yourself for the tests of life. Here you can be encompassed in an environment of learning that will help you fortify your temporal and spiritual self-reliance, lifting and serving others and making the world truly a better place.

I leave with you, my dear friends, my testimony that to be spiritually minded is indeed life and peace, that the quality of life improves when we are in harmony with God and His Son, Jesus Christ, and that God loves you and is mindful

of you and your needs now—your needs today. I bear this testimony in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Merriam-Webster online dictionary, “Word of the Year: *Pandemic*,” Merriam-Webster’s Word of the Year 2020, merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/word-of-the-year; quoting Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, “WHO Director-General’s Opening Remarks at the Media Briefing on COVID-19—11 March 2020,” World Health Organization, 11 March 2020, who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020.

2. “Gallup State of the Student Experience: Fall 2020 Report,” Gallup, Education, gallup.com/education/327485/state-of-the-student-experience-fall-2020.aspx.

3. See “State of the Student Experience,” 8.

4. Romans 8:6; see also verse 5.

5. D&C 29:34; see also verses 30–32.

6. See 1 John 1:3.

7. 1 John 4:14.

8. 1 John 2:15–17.

9. Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught, “To have fellowship with the Lord in this life is to enjoy the companionship of his Holy Spirit . . . ; and to have fellowship with him in eternity is to be like him, having that eternal life of which he is the possessor and originator” (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–73], 3:374).

10. D&C 20:77, 79.

11. Matthew 6:21.

12. Dallin H. Oaks, “Spirituality,” *Ensign*, November 1985; emphasis in original.

13. Quentin L. Cook, “Foundations of Faith,” *Ensign*, May 2017.

14. Galatians 5:22–23.

15. Russell M. Nelson, “Let God Prevail,” *Ensign*, November 2020; quoting Mormon 9:11.

16. Nelson, “Let God Prevail.”

17. Russell M. Nelson, “Protect the Spiritual Power Line,” *Ensign*, November 1984; emphasis in original.

18. D&C 88:118.

19. See D&C 8:2–3.