

# *Light and Truth*

ULISSES SOARES

**M**y wife, Rosana, and I are thrilled to gather with you in this campus devotional today. We have been looking forward to this occasion with great anticipation for several months. I extend to you the love and blessings of our dear prophet, President Russell M. Nelson. He loves you, and he prays for your well-being.

I express my deep gratitude for President Kevin J Worthen and his marvelous team for providing such a weekly spiritual pause, like this devotional, to cheer your souls in the midst of your demanding academic pursuits. My wife and I had a very different college experience than yours, but it was very meaningful to us. We were basically the only students who were active in our faith in our respective schools.

In my case, my spiritual pauses during the week were confined to sitting in my own car to study and ponder the scriptures between classes or during meals. I sometimes went to a local church of another faith that was within walking distance from where I studied. They were kind enough

to leave the church open during the day for the community, and they welcomed visitors. So I took advantage of their friendly invitation and spent time there preparing for my institute classes.

Those private moments represented my weekly spiritual pauses during my college years. Although simple in nature, those sacred pauses provided moments when light and eternal truth strengthened my faith and helped me survive spiritually in my academic environment, which sometimes supported the philosophies of men. Despite these academic circumstances and my sometimes exhausting efforts to gain knowledge for my university degree, the Lord always cared for me and gave me the strength I needed to live by my beliefs and my testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I am so grateful I made time to pause and pursue light and truth, even in my car or in a borrowed church. The time I made for the Lord connected me to heaven, put my studies in perspective, and reenergized my soul. So I hope you take advantage of opportunities, like these weekly

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*Ulisses Soares, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, delivered this devotional address on December 6, 2022.*

devotionals, to truly pause and to renew your discipleship. I pray for the power of the Holy Ghost to attend us this morning as I share the heartfelt message I have prepared for you.

### Seek Light

The inspired lyrics of the beautiful song so well presented a moment ago, “I Will Walk with Jesus,”<sup>1</sup> are an invitation for profound reflection. Truly there is no greater, more thrilling, and more soul-ennobling challenge than learning how to walk with the Lord and simultaneously receiving the magnificent blessing of having Him walk with us. Through the Old Testament *Come, Follow Me* study this year, we have learned about wonderful and faithful disciples who literally walked with the Lord. As we ponder more profoundly the lives of those people, we find that they sought to fill their souls with light and truth despite the wicked environment some of them endured.

Enoch was one such disciple. As he grew in faith and understanding, Enoch was taught in all the ways of God. So great was his faith and so powerful was his language that he helped each member in his community to repent and experience for themselves the light and truth that come from obeying the commandments. Their transformation and conversion were so great that they walked with the Lord and were later taken into heaven. Enoch sought for light and truth in his life, and he was invited to walk with Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

Let’s consider how our search for light and truth in our daily lives can help us walk with Jesus. According to the scriptures, light is “divine energy, power, or influence that proceeds from God through Christ and gives life and light to all things. . . . It also helps [God’s children] understand gospel truths and helps to put them on the gospel path that leads to salvation.”<sup>3</sup> The Book of Mormon prophet Abinadi explained that Jesus Christ “is the light and the life of the world; yea, a light that is endless, that can never be darkened.”<sup>4</sup> The Savior declared, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, as we seek for light in our lives, we are seeking Christ. As we seek Christ and embrace His light, we become His children—“children of

light.”<sup>6</sup> Children of light let their light shine so that others may see their good works and glorify our Father in Heaven.<sup>7</sup> That pursuit leads us to do good in life and gives us the promise that we “shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” As we continue on this path of walking in Jesus’s holy light, we learn, grow, and gain even more light.<sup>8</sup> There is a pattern of gaining light as we walk with Jesus, and, in turn, Jesus walks with each of us individually by blessing us to “always have his Spirit to be with [us].”<sup>9</sup> This is the exact promise the Lord made to Enoch: “And thou shalt abide in me, and I in you; therefore walk with me.”<sup>10</sup>

### Seek Truth

Now let’s turn our attention to truth. The Lord revealed to Joseph Smith that “truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come.”<sup>11</sup> The Prophet Joseph Smith once taught: “Knowledge is necessary to life and godliness. . . . Knowledge is revelation. Hear, all ye brethren, this grand key: knowledge is the power of God unto salvation.”<sup>12</sup> The Lord said:

*The Spirit of truth is of God. I am the Spirit of truth, and John bore record of me, saying: He received a fulness of truth, yea, even of all truth;*

*And no man receiveth a fulness unless he keepeth his commandments.*<sup>13</sup>

My friends, in this context, truth relates to light, knowledge, and revelations from heaven and is consistent with the mind, will, character, glory, and being of God.<sup>14</sup> There is power in truth because “the truth shall make [us] free.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, truth enables us to see clearly, discern and avoid deception, and set a course through the uncertainties of our day. In fact, we should always be searching for truth in our lives in one way or another. The second and fourth verses of the hymn “Oh Say, What Is Truth?” are very instructive in framing the importance of our search for truth:

*Yes, say, what is truth? ’Tis the brightest prize  
To which mortals or Gods can aspire.  
Go search in the depths where it glittering lies,*

*Or ascend in pursuit to the loftiest skies:  
'Tis an aim for the noblest desire.*

. . .

*Then say, what is truth? 'Tis the last and the first,  
For the limits of time it steps o'er.  
Tho the heavens depart and the earth's fountains burst,  
Truth, the sum of existence, will weather the worst,  
Eternal, unchanged, evermore.<sup>16</sup>*

We live in marvelous times when the world is filled with more information than ever before. Yet it has never been harder to discern the truth. We live in a world with differing views, loud and divisive opinions, and subtle philosophies that often come from self-declared experts and influencers—many of whom may be shouting from the dark recesses of the internet. Online there is a seemingly never-ending assault leveled against truth.

The American president Abraham Lincoln liked to engage with his audiences and would often use riddles and humor when he spoke. One story goes that he asked an audience how many legs a dog would have if the tail were counted as a leg. When they said five, he responded that the answer was four, because calling the tail a leg did not make it so.

There really is such a thing as truth. No matter how many people like and share their “truth” or how many social influencers confirm it, the truth is that a tail is not and cannot be a leg. Lincoln’s riddle signifies the difference between “my truth” and the absolute truth. Satan is the master of draining the meaning out of words, changing definitions, and distorting reality. Many people online seem to get away with a lot by changing the definition of something, but arbitrarily changing definitions won’t change reality or what is actually true.

In one sense, the standard of truth for the world has become relative to what feels good. Any questioning of one’s “own truth,” as defined by them for themselves, is taken as controversial and a personal attack. Information without a standard and with the absence of light and truth creates an alternate reality. Consider, for example, the many rabbit holes you have gone down as the algorithms of the internet have shown more and more

content and information based on your clicks and likes. The more you click on something, the more the algorithms of the internet show similar content—not in pursuit of truth but in order to improve advertising and revenue. For example, if you click on dog videos, you may soon think that everyone loves dogs and has a dog and that the internet was actually created by a dog for dog lovers. The internet will show you an ever-increasing number of these images and advertisements to the point that you might start to think that you really need a dog.

In today’s world, you might be able to walk with incredibly powerful technology in your pocket or backpack, but you cannot simply ask technology for light and truth. Walking with technology, even with its amazing capabilities, should never be confused with walking with Jesus. Relying on our walk with worldly voices and earthly sources can leave us vulnerable to false philosophies and untruths. These things may be appealing to us, but they do not represent the truth.

Our dear prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, once taught at this pulpit that

***truth is truth.***

*Some things are simply true. The arbiter of truth is God—not your favorite social media news feed.<sup>17</sup>*

And before him, many years ago, President Spencer W. Kimball, who was the prophet during my days as a university student, also taught in this same setting that absolute truth cannot be “altered by the opinions of men.”<sup>18</sup> Brothers and sisters, “absolute truth exists in a world that increasingly disdains and dismisses absolutes.”<sup>19</sup>

### **Walk with Jesus Christ**

My dear friends, our quest in life is to seek for light and truth and to walk with our Savior and to receive the magnificent blessing of having Him walk with us, despite the darkness that exists in the world today. President Nelson has counseled, “Now, please hear me when I say: Do not be led astray by those whose doubts may be fueled by things *you cannot see* in their lives.”<sup>20</sup> He also invited us to bring light and truth into our testimonies:

*I plead with you to take charge of your testimony. Work for it. Own it. Care for it. Nurture it so that it will grow. Feed it truth. Don't pollute it with the false philosophies of unbelieving men and women and then wonder why your testimony is waning.*<sup>21</sup>

These counsels are indeed an invitation to walk with Jesus so that Jesus can walk with us.

How can we walk in the light and discern the truth without being deceived by relative truths that are advocated by people who are disaffected from divine and absolute truth? May I offer some strategies based on what I have learned from our prophets' inspired teachings and through my own life experience?

### ***1. Study the Book of Mormon Regularly***

First, ask God for inspiration on how to balance your busy schedule so you can spend time studying the Book of Mormon regularly. The truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ are taught most clearly and powerfully in the Book of Mormon. This sacred record of scriptures was a fundamental milestone in the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ in this dispensation, following the visitation of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, to Joseph Smith. The Book of Mormon testifies of God's true and perfect love for His children, Jesus Christ's selfless and divine atoning sacrifice, and the Savior's crowning ministry among the Nephites soon after His Resurrection.<sup>22</sup>

The Book of Mormon contains the answers to life's most compelling questions, and it teaches the doctrine of Christ. As our dear prophet, President Nelson, has taught, the truths contained in this book "have the *power* to heal, comfort, restore, succor, strengthen, console, and cheer our souls."<sup>23</sup> Consider the prophet's promises for those who take the time to study this marvelous book of scripture:

*As you prayerfully study the Book of Mormon every day, you will make better decisions—every day. . . . As you ponder what you study, the windows of heaven will open, and you will receive answers to your own questions and direction for your own life. . . . As you daily immerse yourself in the Book of Mormon, you can be immunized against the evils of the day.*<sup>24</sup>

Spending time in the Book of Mormon will guide you to Jesus Christ and fill you with inspiration and revelation for your life. It will fill your soul with light and help you discern truth.

I read the Book of Mormon from cover to cover for the first time when I was a young seminary student. I still remember the warm feeling that swelled in my soul, filled my heart, enlightened my understanding, and became more and more delightful, as described by Alma when he preached the word of God to his people.<sup>25</sup> That feeling and additional light and truth with which the Lord saw fit to bless me eventually turned into knowledge that took root in my heart and became the foundation of my testimony. The Book of Mormon is the keystone that sustains my faith in the Lord and my testimony of the doctrine of Jesus Christ. It is one of the cornerstones that strengthens my witness of the truth of Christ's divine atoning sacrifice. It is my shield against the adversary's attempts to weaken my faith and instill disbelief and darkness in my mind. It gives me courage to boldly declare my testimony of the light and truth of the Savior to the world. I promise you that as you prayerfully and consistently study the Book of Mormon, you will find light and truth in your life and you will come closer to our Savior Jesus Christ and learn how to walk with Him.

### ***2. Spend More Time in the Lord's Temples***

The second strategy is to spend more time with the Lord in His temples. Since President Nelson's first address to the whole Church in January 2018, he has focused many of his teachings on the important role that the temple and its sacred ordinances and covenants play in our lives. Here is what he taught on that occasion:

*The end for which each of us strives is to be endowed with power in a house of the Lord, sealed as families, faithful to covenants made in a temple that qualify us for the greatest gift of God—that of eternal life. . . . Your worship in the temple and your service there for your ancestors will bless you with increased personal revelation and peace and will fortify your commitment to stay on the covenant path.*<sup>26</sup>

What does this mean for us? Here is President Nelson's answer to this question:

*Our need to be in the temple on a regular basis has never been greater. I plead with you to take a prayerful look at how you spend your time. Invest time in your future and in that of your family. If you have reasonable access to a temple, I urge you to find a way to make an appointment regularly with the Lord—to be in His holy house—then keep that appointment with exactness and joy. I promise you that the Lord will bring the miracles He knows you need as you make sacrifices to serve and worship in His temples.<sup>27</sup>*

My dear friends, this answer is an invitation to refocus our priorities in our lives and include the temple as one of them. Temples are literally houses of the Lord. And when we are there, focused on worshipping Him and seeking for His light and truth, we can feel a distinct impression that we have left the earth behind, and the lone and dreary world is distant from our mind. We feel completely immune to any evil influence from the world. Temples are places of revelation, instruction, and refuge from the spiritual storms we face in our day.

I invite you to consider ways to make time for the Lord in His temples. Come and place your burdens before Him in His holy house, and I promise you that you will be filled with a new spirit and confidence in the future. The Lord will hold you, cradle you, and lead you step-by-step along the path to walk with Him. In the temple we learn the truths of eternity and receive more light as we draw nearer to Jesus and learn how to walk with Him.

### **3. Follow the Words of Our Living Prophets**

The third strategy I offer you is to follow the words of our living prophets. My friends, we are blessed to be led by prophets, who are inspired men called to speak for the Lord. They are called to make known God's will and His true character through their teachings. We can always trust the living prophets. Their teachings reflect the will of the Lord, who declared, "And the voice of warning shall be unto all people, by the mouths of my disciples, whom I have chosen in these last days."<sup>28</sup> In 2 Chronicles in the Old Testament,

we read, "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper."<sup>29</sup>

Having living prophets in our day is a sign of God's love for His children. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, one of our current prophets, seers, and revelators, touched my heart in a very special way at a time when I was in desperate need of comfort. After I received this overwhelming calling to become an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, Elder Holland was the first person to call me. I immediately recognized his distinct, powerful voice on the other end of the line and felt of his and God's love for me. I recognized Elder Holland's voice as the voice of one of the Savior's servants, and it provided me great comfort and confidence in an overwhelming moment.

That is what prophets and apostles do. You do not need to have a personal phone call from one of the Lord's prophets to feel God's love for you. You can feel God's love by simply following their teachings. I invite you, my young friends, to recognize and know their voices and to follow their inspired counsel, which will lead you to light and truth. They are ordained to reveal the Lord's mind and heart. Our greatest safety lies in following the word of the Lord given through His prophets, particularly the current president of the Church. I promise that as you walk with and listen to latter-day prophets and apostles, you will find yourself walking more with Jesus.

Well, my dear friends, we are approaching one of the most beautiful times of the year as we celebrate a truly glorious event in the history of humankind that occurred in Bethlehem of Judea: the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. His birth, life, and atoning sacrifice literally brought light and truth to the world. He Himself declared:

*Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.*

*And behold, I am the light and the life of the world.<sup>30</sup>*

I like the counsel that Paul the apostle gave the Thessalonian Saints: "Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness."<sup>31</sup> As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, you are the children of light! You have the light



of Christ, as well as the guiding light that comes through the gift of the Holy Ghost. Always, always walk in that light, which will lead you to truth and enable you to walk with Jesus Christ.

As we embrace the light and truth of the Savior, we will be able to follow His footsteps and listen for the sound of His sandaled feet and learn how to walk with Him. I pray that each of us will be able to declare with great joy, “I will walk with Jesus,” and then confidently say, “He will walk with me.”<sup>32</sup> Walking with Him is the road best traveled.

I testify that Jesus Christ lives and that His perfect love is extended to all who come unto Him. He is always near, patiently waiting for us when we are weary by the way and forever walking with us wherever we may be. Merry Christmas to all of you. I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. See “I Will Walk with Jesus,” words and music by Stephen P. Schank, in *Friend*, February 2020, 27.
2. See Moses 6–7.
3. Guide to the Scriptures, s.v. “light, light of Christ,” Church of Jesus Christ; see Doctrine and Covenants 88:6–13. See also John 3:19–21; 12:46; Alma 26:15; 32:35; Doctrine and Covenants 93:28–29, 31–32, 40, 42.
4. Mosiah 16:9.
5. John 8:12.
6. 1 Thessalonians 5:5.
7. See Matthew 5:16.
8. “Christ is the light; the gospel is the light; the plan of salvation is the light; ‘that which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day’” (Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary*, 4 vols. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979–81], 2:153; quoting Doctrine and Covenants 50:24).
9. Doctrine and Covenants 20:77.
10. Moses 6:34.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 93:24.
12. Joseph Smith, Nauvoo, Illinois, in “Discourse, 21 May 1843, as Reported by Howard Coray,” in Martha Jane Knowlton Coray, Notebook, 40, Joseph Smith Papers Project, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-21-may-1843-as-reported-by-howard-coray/5.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 93:26–27.
14. See Guide to the Scriptures, s.v. “truth,” Church of Jesus Christ.
15. John 8:32.
16. “Oh Say, What Is Truth?” *Hymns*, 2002, no. 272.
17. Russell M. Nelson, “The Love and Laws of God,” BYU devotional address, 17 September 2019; emphasis in original.
18. Spencer W. Kimball, “Absolute Truth,” BYU devotional address, 6 September 1977.
19. David A. Bednar, “Come and See,” *Ensign*, November 2014.
20. Russell M. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity,” worldwide devotional for young adults, 15 May 2022; emphasis in original.
21. Nelson, “Choices.”
22. See 3 Nephi 11.
23. Russell M. Nelson, “The Book of Mormon: What Would Your Life Be Like Without It?” *Ensign*, November 2017; emphasis in original.
24. Nelson, “The Book of Mormon”; emphasis in original.
25. See Alma 32.
26. Russell M. Nelson, “First Presidency Message: As We Go Forward Together,” *Ensign*, April 2018.
27. Russell M. Nelson, “Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints,” *Ensign*, November 2018.
28. Doctrine and Covenants 1:4; see also Doctrine and Covenants 1:38.
29. 2 Chronicles 20:20.
30. 3 Nephi 11:10–11.
31. 1 Thessalonians 5:5.
32. “I Will Walk with Jesus.”