

Sacrament Meeting Talk - December 27, 2020

About a week ago, a rock jumped up and threw me to the ground, landing me on my cheek. I needed renewing, meaning, "to repair something that is broken." Another meaning of "renewing" is "the state or process of being made spiritually new in the Holy Spirit of Christ." That's the definition of renewing that Ted Kimball asked me to speak about today: Renewing ourselves through Christ this coming year.

Our special challenges these days are too many distractions: computer games, addiction to comfort instead of seeking meaning, TV's in cars, wealth and material comfort. Beware of how instant gratification sucks the life out of us: fast food, cell phones and social status. Multitasking that waters down true involvement: kids doing homework with cell phones, TV, music. Why does all this bother me? Because this is the curse of our world—HAVE MORE AND BE LESS.

So we rededicate ourselves to seek the Spirit. Tad Callister in *The Infinite Atonement* taught, "'An attempt to master an understanding of the Atonement of Jesus Christ requires an immersion of all our senses, all our feelings, and all our intellect. It must be felt, internalized, not just analyzed. . . Our mortal lives are a constant struggle between choosing a oneness with God or a oneness with the world.'

I Must ask—WHO AM I? WHAT AM I BECOMING?

Elder Dallin H. Oaks: "Whereas the world teaches us to **know** something, the gospel teaches us to **become** something, and it is far more significant to **become** than to **know**."

We need to look into our own lives, see where we have allowed ourselves to become deadened, listen with the intent to DO not just HEAR—not just bask in the spirit, but repent, and come unto Christ with full hearts.

The Spirit continually challenges us to be better and to climb higher. However, we need to ask the Lord for directions along the way. We have to ask some difficult questions, like "What do I need to change?" "How can I improve?" "What weakness needs strengthening?"

President Harold B. Lee taught, "Every one of us, if we would reach perfection, must [at] one time ask ourselves this question, 'What lack I yet?'" Look at these examples from an October 2015 Conference talk by Larry R. Lawrence:

I knew a faithful mother who humbled herself and asked, "What is keeping me from progressing?" In her case, the response from the Spirit came immediately: "Stop complaining." In the days that followed, she became conscious of her habit of complaining. She determined to count her blessings that brought the warm approval of the Spirit.

A humble young man who couldn't seem to find the right young woman went to the Lord for help: "What is keeping me from being the right man?" he asked. This answer came into his mind and heart: "Clean up your language." Several crude expressions had become part of his vocabulary, and he committed to change.

A single sister bravely asked the question: "What do I need to change?" and the Spirit whispered to her, "Don't interrupt people when they are talking." The Holy Ghost is a completely honest companion and will tell us things that no one else knows or has the courage to say.

A college girl who was behind in her classes and was generally unhappy. Finally, one day she fell to her knees and cried out, "What can I do to improve my life?" The Holy Ghost whispered, "Get up and clean your room." This surprise was just the start she needed. After taking time to organize and put things in order, she felt Christ's spirit fill her room and lift her heart.

The Spirit works with us at our own speed, one step at a time, or as the Lord has taught, "line upon line, precept upon precept, ... and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, ... for unto him that receiveth I will give more." 2 Nephi 28:30

If spiritual growth is not a priority in our lives, if we are not on a course of steady improvement, we will miss out on the important experiences that God wants to give us.

I would like to suggest that each of you participate in a spiritual exercise sometime soon, perhaps even tonight while saying your prayers. Humbly ask the Lord the following question: "What is keeping me from progressing?" Then wait quietly for a response. If you are sincere, the answer will be revelation intended just for you.

Moroni tells us:

Moroni 10:32 Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and **deny yourselves of all ungodliness**; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.

I ask, Do you love the Savior openly to yourselves every day? When you wake up in the morning, do you think about Christ before you look at your phone or before you turn on the TV? Do you FEEL your bonding with the Savior to let Him know He is your MEANING in life, or do you recognize Him as a FACT you remember mainly on Sunday?

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland: In spite of everything else this general conference tradition may offer us, it will mean little or nothing **unless we find Jesus at the CENTER of it all**. To grasp the vision we are seeking, the healing that He promises, the significance we somehow know is here, we must cut through the commotion—joyful as it is—and **fix our attention on Him**.

Our duty is to learn to listen to Christ and learn to find truth.

Neal A Maxwell counseled: "The Lord loves each of us too much to merely let us go on being what we now are, for He knows what we have the possibility to become.

Listen to the actions of the following three elders who show us how to come to Christ more fully. Look how their choices increase their closeness to the Savior.

First, President Henry B. Eyring, Conference October 2007: My father-in-law, who lived near us, surprised me as I walked toward the front door of my house because he was carrying a load of pipes over his shoulder to help with the water pump from a stream below. I took a few steps toward the house, thinking of what he was doing for us, and just as I got to the door, I heard in my mind—not in my own voice—these words: "I'm not giving you these experiences for yourself. Write them down." . . . Oh, I was tired but took out some paper and began to write. As I did, I understood the message I had heard in my mind I was supposed to record for my children to read someday in the future. . .I wrote down a few lines every day for years. I never missed a day no matter how tired I was. I would ponder this question: "Have I seen the hand of God reaching out to touch us or our children or our family today? Something began to happen. I would see evidence of what God had done for one of us that I had not recognized in the busy moments of the day. . .I realized that trying to remember had allowed God to show me what He had done. . .My point I to urge you to find ways to recognize and remember God's kindness.

Second, President Russell M. Nelson, Conference April 2017: Today I would like to speak about *HOW* we can draw into our lives the power of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. . .Earlier this year I asked the young adults of the Church to consecrate a portion of their time each week to study *EVERYTHING* Jesus said and did as recorded in the standard works and let the scriptural citations about Jesus Christ in

the Topical Guide become their personal core curriculum. I gave that challenge because I had already accepted it myself and read and underlined every verse cited about Jesus Christ, as listed under the main heading and the 57 subtitles in the Topical Guide. When I finished that exciting exercise, I told my wife, "I am a different man!" I had a renewed devotion to Him.

Third, Elder Robert Daines, *BYU Devotional 2000*: But to feast on the words of Christ is different than to snack on or even to just read them. Would you try for 30 minutes each day to feast from the scriptures. Do not set a target for reading a chapter a day or a specific number of verses a day, but instead, set your targets in terms of time. Feast, meditate, reflect, ponder, apply. . . .It is not sufficient to just understand the principles of Christ and His gospel. It is necessary to practice them.

We show love for Christ by making space in our lives for Him by discovering the power of writing, deeply studying Christ's life, and choosing to feast on scriptures as these three brethren did.

When I picture the place of Christ in my life, I think of a vortex of brilliant light, swirling around in the center of my life. This light infuses every moment of my waking hours and eclipses and darkness, fear, doubt, with its spirit and power. That is how I want Christ to fill my life; I don't want to know about Him. I want him filling every nerve ending in my body and soul. I am learning to choose Christ over my human desires

D&C 6:20 states "Be faithful and diligent in keeping the commandments of God, and I will encircle thee in the arms of my love."

C.S. Lewis shared these feelings: "Christ has infinite attention to spare for each one of us. He does not have to deal with us in the mass. You are as much alone with Him as if you were the only being He had ever created. When Christ died, He died for you individually just as much as if you had been the only man in the world."

Open your hearts. Let yourselves be taught. Feel the love Christ has for you. Today, take home with you your resolve to let your heart be so full of Christ's love that your behavior will reflect your understanding of trusting in the Lord. To help you feel the tangible power of Christ, listen to a dream that Elder Melvin J. Ballard, an apostle under President Heber J. Grant, experienced. Listen with your heart. Elder Ballard reports:

I found myself in that sacred building, the temple. After a season of prayer and rejoicing, I was informed that I should have the privilege of entering into one of those rooms to meet a glorious Personage, and, as I entered the door, I saw, seated on a raised platform, the most glorious Being my eyes have ever beheld. As I approached to be introduced, Christ arose and stepped towards me with extended arms, and he smiled as he softly spoke my name. If I shall live to be a million years old, I shall never forget that smile. He took me into his arms and kissed me, pressed me to his bosom and blessed me, until the marrow of my bones seemed to melt! When he had finished, I fell at his feet, and, as I bathed them with my tears and kisses, I saw the prints of the nails in the feet of the Redeemer of the world. The feeling that I had in the presence of him who hath all things in his hands, to have his love, his affection, and his blessing was such that if I ever can receive that of which I had but a foretaste, I would give all that I am, all that I ever hope to be, to feel what I then felt.

Imagine the joy Christ experiences when we give up leaning to our own understanding and fully, wholly trust in the Lord and allow him to direct our paths and help us to purify our hearts and actions with his love. Let this scripture live in your hearts and actions.

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

Be renewed each day, week, month. Keep renewing your intimate relationship with Christ throughout this new year of 2021.

May I leave you with my testimony:

My heart is full of the love of Christ. I have learned to study and savor His words in a new and meaningful way and to think of Him before I make any kind of a mundane decision in my daily life. I am beginning to FEEL the Atonement in the most rudimentary way, and I have made a beginning. I am choosing to feel Christ instead of rehearsing only the facts I remember about Him. I ask the Lord to bless me to center my life, thoughts, FEELINGS and behaviors in the life of Jesus Christ. My deep gratitude for the Lord's love allows me to function on a spiritual, not just a FACTUAL, level. I am filled with love for this knowledge, and I say this in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

