

Be Faithful, Not Faithless

By Stephen W. Owen
Young Men General President

We must deliberately take time each day to disconnect from the world and connect with heaven.

Not long ago I woke up and prepared to study the scriptures. I picked up my smartphone and sat in a chair next to my bed with the intention of opening the Gospel Library app. I unlocked my phone and was just about to begin studying when I saw a half dozen notifications for text messages and emails that had come during the night. I thought, “I’ll quickly check those messages, and then I’ll get right to the scriptures.” Well, two hours later I was still reading text messages, emails, news briefs, and social media posts. When I realized what time it was, I frantically rushed to get ready for the day. That morning I missed my scripture study, and consequently I didn’t get the spiritual nourishment I was hoping for.

Spiritual Nourishment

I’m sure many of you can relate. Modern technologies bless us in many ways. They can connect us with friends and family, with information, and with news about current events around the world. However, they can also distract us from the most important connection: our connection with heaven.

I repeat what our prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, has said: “We live in a world that is complex and increasingly contentious. The constant availability of social media and a 24-hour news cycle bombard us with relentless messages. If we are to have any hope of sifting through the myriad of voices and the philosophies of men that attack truth, we must learn to receive revelation.”

President Nelson went on to warn that “in coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost.”¹

Years ago, President Boyd K. Packer told of a herd of deer that, because of heavy snowfall, was trapped outside its natural habitat and faced possible starvation. Some well-meaning people, in an effort to save the deer, dumped truckloads of hay around the area—it wasn’t what deer would normally eat, but they hoped it would at least get the deer through the winter. Sadly, most of the deer were later found dead. They had eaten the hay, but it did not nourish them, and they starved to death with their stomachs full.²

Many of the messages that bombard us in the information age are the spiritual equivalent of feeding hay to deer—we can eat it all day long, but it will not nourish

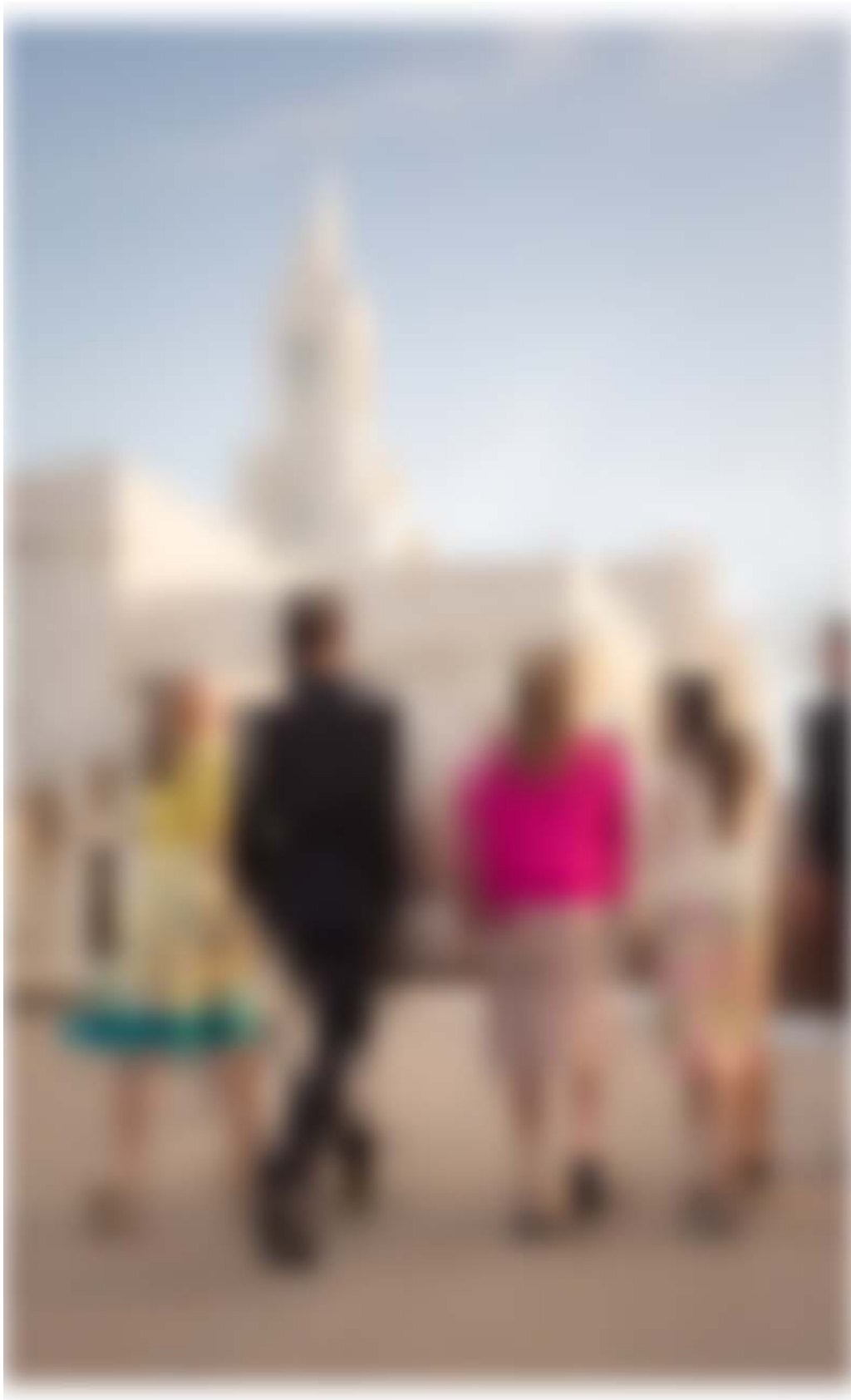
us.

Where do we find true spiritual nourishment? Most often, it is not trending on social media. We find it when we “press [our] way forward” on the covenant path, “continually holding fast to the rod of iron,” and partake of the fruit of the tree of life.³ This means that we must deliberately take time each day to disconnect from the world and connect with heaven.

In his dream, Lehi saw people who partook of the fruit but then abandoned it because of the influence of the great and spacious building, the pride of the world.⁴ It is possible for young people to be raised in a Latter-day Saint home, attend all the right Church meetings and classes, even participate in ordinances in the temple, and then walk away “into forbidden paths and [become] lost.”⁵ Why does this happen? In many cases it is because, while they may have been going through the motions of spirituality, they were not truly converted. They were fed but not nourished.



In contrast, I have met many of you young Latter-day Saints who are bright, strong, and faithful. You know that you are sons and daughters of God and that He has a work for you to do. You love God with all your “heart, might, mind and strength.”⁶ You keep your covenants and serve others, beginning at home. You exercise faith, repent, and improve each day, and this brings you enduring joy. You are preparing for temple blessings and other opportunities you will have as true followers of the Savior. And you are helping prepare the world for the Second Coming, inviting all to come unto Christ and receive the blessings of His Atonement. You are connected with heaven.



Yes, you face challenges. But so does every generation. These are our days, and we need to be faithful, not faithless. I testify that the Lord knows about our challenges, and through the leadership of President Nelson, He is preparing us to meet them. I believe that the prophet's recent call for a home-centered church,

supported by what we do in our buildings,⁷ is designed to help us survive—even thrive—in this day of spiritual malnutrition.

Home Centered

What does it mean to be a home-centered church? Homes can look very different across the world. You may belong to a family that has been in the Church for many generations. Or you may be the only member of the Church in your family. You may be married or single, with or without children at home.

Regardless of your circumstances, you can make your home the center of gospel learning and living. It simply means taking personal responsibility for your conversion and spiritual growth. It means following President Nelson’s counsel “to [remodel your] home into a sanctuary of faith.”⁸

The adversary will try to persuade you that spiritual nourishment isn’t necessary or, more cunningly, that it can wait. He is the master of distraction and author of procrastination. He will bring things to your attention that seem urgent but in reality aren’t that important. He would have you become so “troubled about many things” that you neglect the “one thing [that] is needful.”⁹

How grateful I am for my “goodly parents,”¹⁰ who raised their family in a home of constant spiritual nourishment, loving relationships, and wholesome recreational activities. The teachings they provided in my youth have held me in good stead. Parents, please build strong relationships with your children. They need more of your time, not less.

Church Supported

As you do, the Church is there to support you. Our experiences at church can reinforce the spiritual nourishment that happens at home. So far this year, we have seen this kind of Church support in Sunday School and Primary. We will see more of it in Aaronic Priesthood and Young Women meetings too. Starting this January, the curriculum for these meetings will be adjusted slightly. It will still focus on gospel topics, but those topics will be aligned with *Come, Follow Me—For Individuals and Families*. This is a small change, but it can make a big impact on the spiritual nourishment of the youth.

What other kinds of support does the Church provide? At church we partake of the sacrament, which helps us reestablish our commitment to the Savior each week. And at church we gather with other believers who have made the same covenants. The loving relationships we develop with fellow disciples of Jesus Christ can be a powerful support to our home-centered discipleship.

When I was 14, my family moved to a new neighborhood. Now, this may not seem like a terrible tragedy to you, but in my mind, at that time, it was devastating. It

meant being surrounded by people I didn't know. It meant that all the other young men in my ward would be attending a different school than I was. And in my 14-year-old mind, I thought, "How could my parents do this to me?" I felt as if my life had been ruined.

However, through our Young Men activities, I was able to build relationships with the other members of my quorum, and they became my friends. In addition, members of the bishopric and Aaronic Priesthood advisers began to take a special interest in my life. They attended my athletic events. They wrote me encouraging notes that I have kept to this day. They continued to keep in touch with me after I went to college and when I left for a mission. One of them was even at the airport when I came home. I will be forever grateful for these good brothers and their combination of love and high expectations. They pointed me heavenward, and life became bright, happy, and joyful.

How do we, as parents and leaders, help the youth know they are not alone as they walk the covenant path? In addition to building personal relationships, we invite them to gatherings large and small—from For the Strength of Youth conferences and youth camps to weekly quorum and class activities. Never underestimate the strength that comes from gathering with others who are also trying to be strong. Bishops and other leaders, please focus on nourishing the children and youth in your ward. They need more of your time, not less.

Whether you are a leader, a neighbor, a quorum member, or simply a fellow Saint, if you have the opportunity to touch the life of a young person, help him or her connect with heaven. Your influence might be exactly the "Church support" that young person needs.

Brothers and sisters, I testify that Jesus Christ is at the head of this Church. He is inspiring our leaders and guiding us to the spiritual nourishment we need to survive and thrive in the latter days. That spiritual nourishment will help us be faithful and not faithless. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.