

Serving the Lord in our Homes: The Powerful Effect of our Own Personal Transformation

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Brothers and sisters, we live in an era of doubt; doubt about the reality of God, and the value of religion in general. The Pew Research Center report from 2015 states: “Religious “nones” are not only growing as a share of the U.S. population, but they are becoming more secular [or in other words, less likely to believe in God] ..., a fact that also is helping to make the U.S. public overall somewhat less religious, according to surveys done as part of our Religious Landscape Study.” This drift away from God and religion has hit the younger generations much harder. A KUTV article written in 2017 states: “Nearly 60 percent of all millennials raised in a church have stopped going.” The article states that our church has not been immune to this trend.

The modern world in general seems to increasingly believe that they have been able to put behind them such childish things as religion and commandments. Truth is relative and life is short, so why waste your time? Some that do believe in God rationalize that they can connect with him much better in nature or relaxing at home than dealing with the hassle of going to church, which is really just another excuse for pleasure seeking and self absorption that usually requires no engagement in a community, no soul searching, and no change. As stated by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland:

“Sadly enough, my young friends, it is a characteristic of our age that if people want any gods at all, they want them to be gods who do not demand much, comfortable gods, smooth gods who not only don’t rock the boat but don’t even row it, gods who pat us on the head, make us giggle, then tell us to run along and pick marigolds.

Talk about man creating God in his own image! Sometimes—and this seems the greatest irony of all—these folks invoke the name of Jesus as one who was this kind of “comfortable” God. Really? He who said not only should we not break commandments, but we should not even *think* about breaking them. And if we do think about breaking them, we have already broken them in our heart. Does that sound like “comfortable” doctrine, easy on the ear and popular down at the village love-in?” -Elder Jeffrey R. Holland April 2014 Conference

At the same time this exodus has occurred away from religion, or any kind of meaningful God, we have seen rising rates of depression and suicide, of hopelessness and despair. There are obviously many factors that contribute to this, but among them is clearly a loss of faith in God and religious participation. Both Harold Koenig, a psychiatrist on the faculty of Duke University and Tyler VanderWeele, a professor of epidemiology at Harvard University, have found clear connections between religious observance and “better mental health in the areas of depression, substance abuse and suicide”, as well as “a roughly 30 percent reduction in mortality over 16 years of follow-up; a five-fold reduction in the likelihood of suicide; and a 30 percent reduction in the incidence of depression”

I recently read a scripture in Jacob 4:15-16 that jumped off the page at me. The prophet Jacob is speaking about the Jews. I feel that it appropriately applies to all of us, but especially to those that are struggling with their faith. As I read this, whenever it says Jews, I will replace it with the words “our beloved youth”. Says Jacob:

“I perceive by the workings of the Spirit which is in me, that by the stumbling of [our beloved youth] they will reject the stone [which is Christ] upon which they might build and have safe foundation. But behold, according to the scriptures, this stone shall become the great, and the last, and the only sure foundation, upon which [our beloved youth] can build.” Jacob 4:15-16

We could just as easily insert “by the stumbling of the millenials”, or “the people of the modern age”, or even our own names.

So what is the answer? How can we help those who doubt, especially our loved ones, to find greater purpose and meaning in their lives? What service can we render in our homes that will help protect our families? I will answer by paraphrasing a dialogue I once had with an individual. It didn’t come out as elegantly as what I present here, but the heart of it is still in these words. I said:

“You have to choose what framework you want to build your life around. No one else can do it for you, even if they wanted to. It is your choice and yours alone. You could choose to build your life around pleasure seeking, or the

acquisition of money, or possessions, or power, or sex, or politics. You could build it around global warming, or curing cancer, or saving the whales, or any number of causes. You could even choose to not choose, which would be a choice to build your life around nothing at all. I have chosen to build my life around Christ and his restored gospel. For me it has made ALL the difference. I have stated very clearly that I know that the restored gospel is true. But let us suppose for a moment that it isn't, that I have deceived myself and when I die there is only nothingness in the hereafter. If that were the case I would still have no regrets about a life wasted. In all of my searching I have found nothing that has had a greater impact for good on my heart and my mind than the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. I have found nothing else that has had such power on me; that causes me to strive to be the best, most honorable, most loving, and compassionate human being that I can possibly be. I often fall short, but the gospel gives me the motivation to keep trying. I would feel no regret that I had wasted money on Fast Offerings to help the down trodden, or wasted my tithing on a church that has such a powerful affect for good on mankind, or wasted my time with people that I have come to love and cherish. But the incredible thing is that it IS true. I know it is. I have found so many, many reasons to believe and to know. So by building my life around Christ and His covenants I get to experience all of these powerful and profound changes and experiences in this life, and look forward to even more wonderful things in the hereafter."

Brothers and sisters, I believe this is the answer. The most beneficial service for us to render to the Lord in our homes is to choose to allow ourselves to be transformed by the gospel. We need to be the most transformed of anyone that we know. Since ultimately, the only person we can control and change is ourselves, we have to be the model for those that we love of how powerful the restored gospel can be in their lives; what purpose and strength that it provides.

I am not suggesting that we should act like our lives are happy and perfect. I am suggesting just the opposite. Our children, our siblings, our parents, and our friends need to see how the gospel has transformed us, what peace it brings us, what impact the truths of the gospel have on real, flawed individuals. They need to see us trying to overcome our weaknesses. They need to see us forgiving others and asking for forgiveness. They need to see us apologizing to our spouse or our coworkers when we are unkind. They need to see us doing acts of service for them and others. They need to see us

praying and fasting for help to solve our problems and endure our trials. They need to see us finding answers and inspiration from the scriptures, from the Temple, and from Sabbath Day observance. They need to see how we find strength and power through striving to keep our covenants. They need to hear our stories of how far we have come and see us continually getting back up when we fall down. In short, we need to let the light of the Savior's atonement shine through our lives. We can do this by openly letting people see the process of God slowly shaping us and improving us, of healing us and empowering us.

A good analogy to this is the process of teaching children how to swim. In the past, some have thought that the best way of teaching a child to swim is to just throw them in and hope for the best. For the natural swimmers, this might work. But for the rest of us it may traumatize us into never getting into the water again. Others might think that holding the child in the water against their will and forcing them to swim might be the best. But this often causes either fear or resentment against both the teacher and the water. No..., the best method is for the teacher to get into the water and demonstrate the benefits and the fun times that could be had if the child would only learn how to swim. They need to be showing them the strokes. The teacher needs to entice and encourage by words and example, but never by force. Such is the case with the gospel. Some of our youth are natural swimmers, but for the rest we have to patiently encourage them to come into the water by word and by example. But to do this, we ourselves cannot just be dipping our toes in the waters of the gospel. We need to be completely immersed. In her book called "Women and the Priesthood", Sheri Dew states:

"A testimony is a wonderful starting point. But it is only a beginning. A testimony, or belief, that the Church is true will not be enough to see us through in the days ahead. It won't be enough to sustain our own lives, let alone enough to allow others to see the light of the gospel shining through us. As President Henry B. Eyring has taught: "Great faith has a short shelf life." *Conversion requires immersion.* Immersion in truth. Immersion in the scriptures. Immersion in the temple. Immersion through fasting, prayer, and time to contemplate the things of heaven. We need to think

about the Lord more. We need to seek to understand who He is and what He taught. The more we know about the Lord Jesus Christ, the more we will want to know. The more we testify about what we know, the more it will become integral to who we are.”

In closing, I want to share a few more of the verses from Jacob chapter 4. After he states that Christ is the only foundation on which the Jews can ever build he says: “And now, my beloved, how is it possible that these, after having rejected the sure foundation, can ever build upon it, that it may become the head of their corner? Behold, my beloved brethren, I will unfold this mystery unto you”. He then goes on to share the beautiful allegory of the Olive Tree from the Prophet Zenos, which shows the Lord’s tireless efforts to continually reach out over and over and over again to his lost children. What a fitting allegory to describe the Lord’s tender watch care over the precious trees of his vineyard.

Brothers and sisters, please know that the Lord has provided a way for those that fall away to become all the stronger from the experience when they eventually turn back to him; for his love is stronger than the cords of death and wider than all eternity. If we choose, he has made a way for all to come back, even those that take a detour for a season.

To those that are struggling with their faith, I would say: We all have a long journey before us to return to our Heavenly Father, a journey lined with covenants made and kept, of growth and learning by obedience and sacrifice. Delaying to start or get back on that journey will not make the journey any shorter. It just prolongs the time of our arrival at our destination and holds us far distant from our eventual attainment of a peace and joy that surpasses all understanding.

Brothers and sisters, after all is said and done, after all we can do, and all we have done, please remember that our children, our siblings, our parents, and our friends, were His a long time before they were ours. He loves them, and us, more than we can possibly know. He will never ever stop trying to bring back His lost sheep. Of this truth I testify, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ. Amen.