

Keeping the Spiritual Lifeblood Flowing

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Brothers and sisters, not too many years ago, as an undergraduate student at BYU, I was attending these devotionals with a wonderful young lady I had met in a BYU student ward. Through some investigation, I learned that on certain days, when I was finishing a physics class in the Eyring Science Center, this young lady was also finishing a class in the Spencer W. Kimball Tower. I was careful to make sure that each week we would “coincidentally” meet on the sidewalk of the intersection of these two buildings so we could attend devotionals together or walk to the Wilkinson Center to have lunch.

This young lady and I have now been married for thirty-three years. My wife, Joyce, and I are happy to be here today and to share this brief time with you. I hope that what I say today might be meaningful and uplifting, and I appreciate the prayer and music, which have invited the Spirit to be with us.

Quickening Our Pace

When I was first considering what topic I might address for this devotional, I was walking home from the priesthood session of our last general conference reflecting on my impressions of our new prophet, President Russell M. Nelson. Everything—from the way President Nelson approached the stand to the manner and tone in which he delivered his messages to the new

directions that were presented regarding priesthood quorums and, later, the reemphasis on ministering in the Savior’s way—caused me to reflect on my service in the gospel of Jesus Christ. I determined that in order to keep up in terms of the gospel, I was going to need to roll up my sleeves and rededicate myself to the work—early retirement didn’t seem to be an option. Indeed, if I needed to “lengthen my stride” to accept President Spencer W. Kimball’s challenge as a young man in the 1970s, I would now need to “quicken my pace” to be able to follow President Nelson’s counsel as an adult.

President Nelson’s comment during the Sunday morning session of the April 2018 general conference was especially poignant to me:

In coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost.¹

Surviving spiritually and having the constant influence of the Holy Ghost are the two main topics I would like to emphasize in the remaining time we have together.

Steven L. Shumway, a professor in the BYU Technology and Engineering Studies program, delivered this devotional address on June 26, 2018.

Getting Off the Horse to Walk

To introduce my talk and to provide a context for our discussion today, I would like to tell you a story from when I was ten or eleven years old. I was raised on a cattle ranch in northwestern Wyoming, in an area that is referred to as the Big Horn Basin, between the communities of Cody and Thermopolis. Each spring on the ranch, after the baby calves were born, we would round up our cattle and take them to a pasture area in the mountains behind my grandfather's place.

In this particular year we had already taken the cattle to the mountains when a late spring snow came, bringing freezing temperatures and large snow drifts. Because of the danger to the cattle, especially the baby calves, my father suggested that we saddle our horses and ride up to the mountain rangeland to bring the cattle to a lower pasture area. To put it mildly, I was honored to be considered old enough for this opportunity, and the thought of spending the day riding horses with my father while gathering the cattle was exciting.

We saddled the horses and left the homeplace midmorning, blazing a trail through the newly fallen snow. We had a great day riding and talking about life, work, and the gospel. As a sidenote, my father served his mission in Tennessee and West Virginia and knew all the questions that missionaries would get on their mission, so as we would ride, he would ask me gospel questions and help me with my answers. I guess this was my version of a mission prep course.

We rode most of the day looking for our cattle, but unfortunately we were not able to locate them until late in the afternoon. By this time the sun was going down and the temperature was dropping dramatically. Because of the baby calves, the going was slow, and, to make matters worse, a big windstorm came in, blowing snow and making it difficult to see where we were going. I was sure we were lost. It continued to get colder, and because there was no moon, it became pitch black. So I just put my horse behind my father's horse and followed him, trusting that he knew the way home.

As we were riding, my father suddenly stopped his horse and turned to me. What he said totally caught me by surprise and made me very concerned. He said, "Steve, you need to get off your horse right now. We need to start walking!"

I thought to myself, "How are we ever going to get home if we are walking with our horses rather than riding them?" This did not seem like such a good idea to me. However, I was obedient and got off my horse without arguing. It was then that I realized the blood circulation to my feet had slowed considerably and my feet were partially frozen, so I could not feel them.

From his past experiences of riding horses in bad weather, my father knew this would happen. He said that we would have to walk along with our horses for some time in order to get the blood circulating in our feet again.

When I got off my horse, I could barely stand. Leading my horse by the bridle, I held on to the tail of my father's horse as we started walking slowly toward home, trailing the cattle. As I began walking, I began to feel my feet again. At first, as the blood started to flow, it was very painful. However, soon I was warm, my feet were all right, and the feeling had come back to them.

After these many years, the concept that left a lasting impression with me is that when my feet were frozen, walking was the last thing I wanted to do because it was so painful. However, in reality, it was the very thing I needed to do in order to renew the flow of blood to my feet and be able to return back to normal activity. Again, the thing I wanted to do the least was actually the thing I needed to do the most to save myself from harm.

Throughout my life, this has been a recurring theme. There have been times when I have not felt like praying, but prayer was exactly what I needed. There have been times when I have not felt like attending specific church meetings, only to discover that the counsel given in those meetings was exactly what I needed to hear. I have also had specific church callings that I have not felt capable of successfully performing. Fortunately, I have a loving Heavenly Father who knows what I need

better than I do and who has provided me with opportunities to serve and to grow spiritually.

Brothers and sisters, I ask you to reflect on this concept as I speak today. I would guess that there have been and will continue to be times in each of our lives in which we will need to make difficult decisions in order to save ourselves physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Increasing Spiritual Strength Through Service

The analogy that I would like to make from this story to each of our lives is that maintaining the constant influence of the Holy Ghost is the lifeblood of our spiritual strength and that there are specific decisions and actions that we will need to make in order to survive spiritually when it is stormy. When the weather was nice and sunny, my blood circulation was adequate with minimal effort on my part as I rode my horse. It was specifically during the storm that I needed the extra benefits of circulation. To me, this follows President Nelson's warning that "in coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the . . . constant influence of the Holy Ghost."

We know that wickedness in the world is increasing, and there is a storm raging around us and our families that will most likely become worse. The question that I would like to present to all of us today is "How can we keep our spiritual lifeblood flowing so that we will have the strength and the ability to continue our journey to return again to be with the Savior and our Heavenly Father?" I feel that the sisters and brethren who have been called to lead the Church of Jesus Christ in these latter days have also been considering this question on our behalf. In addition to their continued counsel to sustain scripture study, engage in personal prayer, strengthen family unity, and attend church meetings and the temple, they have recently reemphasized that providing service to our fellow brothers and sisters, or ministering in the Savior's way, is one of the best ways to spiritually strengthen ourselves.

In the recent general conference, President Henry B. Eyring taught the priesthood brethren this concept when he commented:

It seems to me that we receive the Holy Spirit best when we are focused on serving others. That is why we have the priesthood responsibility to serve for the Savior. When we are engaged in service to others, we think less about ourselves, and the Holy Ghost can more readily come to us and help us in our lifelong quest to have the gift of charity bestowed upon us.²

While the concept of serving others and ministering is not new, the recent emphasis on ministering presented during general conference has a refreshing and underlying tone that allows for more active personal participation on our part as disciples of Christ. Additionally, while the obvious outcome of service is to help and comfort those with whom we associate, perhaps just as important is the idea that we need the benefits of actively serving those around us; perhaps ministering will provide us with the spiritual strength that will be needed in the increasingly difficult times we know are coming.

So how can we more actively serve one another? What is ministering in the Savior's way? During his recent devotional on this campus on April 10, 2018, Elder Neil L. Andersen taught us that "a holier approach to ministering" contains several key components.³ As disciples of Christ, our lives are not all about us; rather, we should focus on providing service to those around us, including family, friends, and even strangers. Reading the stories of Jesus from the New Testament provides examples from when He served His family, such as when He honored and served His mother at the wedding feast when He turned the water to wine; when He served His friends, such as when He healed and raised His friend Lazarus from the dead; and even when He served strangers, which includes my personal favorite story in the scriptures of when the Savior healed the servant of the centurion.

Elder Andersen also taught that when we engage in service, we should include some spiritual component that helps those we serve strengthen their faith and come closer to the Savior. For me, this spiritual component of service is one that I need to improve on. I feel confident

in my ability to fix a car, perform yardwork, help neighbors move, and do service in general. However, adding that spiritual component is going to require a little more thought, effort, harmony with the Spirit, and willingness to form a personal connection with those I serve.

While I am confident that serving my family, my friends, and strangers is something that I need to do to maintain spiritual strength, I still ask myself, “How am I going to follow James’s advice in the New Testament when he counseled, ‘But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves’ (James 1:22)?”

Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf helped me better frame my resolve to be a doer and not hearer only when he remarked during the April 2009 general conference that

discipleship is not a spectator sport. We cannot expect to experience the blessings of faith by standing inactive on the sidelines any more than we can experience the benefits of health by sitting on a sofa watching sporting events on television and giving advice to the athletes.⁴

For example, it might be “natural” for us to have times in our lives when we want to coast a little and take an easier route when it comes to general service in church responsibilities.

- Maybe we have just finished serving in a major calling in our ward or as a full-time missionary, and we feel that we now deserve to be able to slow down just a little bit and take a break from service.
- Maybe we are college students and our lives are busy with the rigors of working and studying, and we feel that we can justify wanting to take it easy for the time being, so we promise ourselves that we will actively focus on serving and ministering when we graduate.
- Maybe we have a new job and a young family, and we feel that we need to put service temporarily on hold so that we can focus on employment while we get our feet under ourselves.

While those feelings may be “natural” in terms of world philosophy, we learn in the scriptures that the ways of the natural man are not the Lord’s ways (see Isaiah 55:8–9). Remember in my story how walking was the last thing I wanted to do, when in fact it was the thing I needed to do the most? I believe that sometimes when we perceive that we are too busy or feel that we are not ready or that we do not want to be involved in service to others, this is in fact the time when we need to do these things the most.

I have spent much of my life searching the scriptures, and as far as I can tell, there is no retirement in the Lord’s system. For those who have recently returned from missions, I would encourage each of you to fill your lives with active service. I promise you that your lives will be blessed and that your ability to make important decisions in this critical time of your life will be enhanced through serving others. Although the signs at the entrance of this campus encourage each of us to “Enter to learn [and] go forth to serve,” perhaps we can unofficially modify the motto to say, “Enter to learn, serve while you are learning, and then go forth to serve the world!”

Students, the impact that each of you will have as you leave this university and go to different places in the world is incredible. Every year during graduation ceremonies, I look out at the sea of graduating students and reflect on the impact that each of you are going to have on your communities and local church congregations as you take your secular and spiritual knowledge with you to bless the lives of others.

In his recent BYU commencement address in April, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland recommended to the graduates:

So go out there and light a candle. Be a ray of light. Be your best self and let your character shine. Cherish the gospel of Jesus Christ and live it. The world needs you, and surely your Father in Heaven needs you if His blessed purposes for His children are to prevail. You have entered to learn. Now go forth to serve and strengthen.⁵

All of us need to reflect on how “when [we] are in the service of [our] fellow beings [we] are only in the service of [our] God” (Mosiah 2:17). The greatest gift we can give to the Savior is to love and serve one another.

Now, in recommending this counsel, I would also like to endorse the advice found in Doctrine and Covenants 10:4, in which the Lord counseled Joseph Smith, “Do not run faster or labor more than you have strength and means . . . ; but be diligent unto the end.” Remember, when I needed additional blood circulation, I got off my horse and walked slowly to build stamina. I did not suddenly decide to run or even to carry my horse! Each of us needs to maintain a careful balance in the amount of ministering and service that we give. How much we serve or what we do to serve others can be best determined through personal inspiration and revelation that we receive from the Savior.

Regaining the Companionship of the Holy Ghost

Thus far in my talk, I have proposed that serving our fellow brothers and sisters is an effective way to keep the spiritual lifeblood flowing, which is necessary to increase our ability to return to live with our Heavenly Father. I would like to finish my talk today by discussing what we can do if we find ourselves in situations in which, because of choices we have made or because of the influence of the world, we find ourselves “spiritually frozen” and with feelings of hopelessness about our ability to regain the companionship of the Holy Ghost.

We know from the scriptures that in the premortal existence we all attended the Grand Council in Heaven, in which we learned about Heavenly Father’s plan for our salvation. While we know that we “shouted for joy” (Job 38:7) at the prospect of coming to this earth, we also learned that many of us would be deceived, choose poor paths, and become lost and that all of us would have trials, but that these trials would be for our good (see D&C 122:7).

In each of our lives there are many destructive influences—such as alcohol, drugs, pornography, smoking, immorality, lax church attendance, and

even excessive gaming—that Satan can use to deceive us. While it would seem that the obvious choice is to avoid these destructive influences in our lives, we do not always make the obvious choice. If we persist in our poor choices, they can lead to addictions and a perceived loss of agency until, it would seem, it is impossible for us to overcome these destructive influences or to remove them from our lives. Slowly we find that the Spirit refuses to dwell with us, and, in a sense, we become spiritually frozen. At this point, repenting and cleansing our lives can feel like the last thing we would like to do, when in fact it is the very thing we need to do the most. Fortunately, nothing is impossible with the Savior, and through the Atonement of Jesus Christ we can always repent and cleanse our lives and have hope of regaining the companionship of the Holy Spirit.

My favorite example of this feeling of hope is found in the experience of Alma the Younger in the Book of Mormon. Because of his disobedience and persecution of the Church of God, Alma, along with the sons of Mosiah, was visited by an angel, who chastised him for seeking to destroy the Church of God. The seriousness of this visit caused Alma and his companions to fall to the earth in distress and hopelessness.

Alma described his feelings in Alma 36:12–13 when he related:

But I was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins.

Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell; yea, I saw that I had rebelled against my God, and that I had not kept his holy commandments.

If we continue reading, we learn that Alma the Younger was “in the gall of bitterness” (Alma 36:18; see also verses 14–16). Just when it seemed it would be impossible for him to repent, his thoughts were led by the Spirit back to what his father had taught him about the Savior and the Atonement, and he was delivered from his despair (see Alma 36:17–21).

The miracle is that even though we might be spiritually frozen, as children of a loving Heavenly Father, we still are allowed to partake of the influence of the Holy Spirit to help us come back to the Savior. He never gives up on us. If we listen to the Spirit, repent, and allow the Spirit to become part of our lives through the power of the Atonement—if we get off the horse and walk awhile—the circulation of the Spirit will once again begin to flow. Let me read Alma’s words to his son Helaman, found in Alma 36:21:

Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy.

I finish with my testimony, that I know we are children of a loving Heavenly Father. I know that His Son, Jesus Christ, promised His Father and each one of us in the premortal existence that He would come to this earth and, through His Atonement, make it possible for us to return

to live with our Heavenly Father. In addition, Heavenly Father has provided the companionship and influence of the Holy Ghost in our lives to help us in our efforts to return to live with our Father. By keeping the commandments and serving each other, we can have the constant influence of the Holy Ghost to strengthen us spiritually, as our prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, has counseled.

This I say in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” *Ensign*, May 2018.
2. Henry B. Eyring, “Inspired Ministering,” *Ensign*, May 2018.
3. See Neil L. Andersen, “A Holier Approach to Ministering,” BYU devotional address, 10 April 2018.
4. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “The Way of the Disciple,” *Ensign*, May 2009.
5. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Banishing All Shadows,” BYU commencement address, 26 April 2018.