

Seek Him with All Your Heart

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Empty

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If Jesus Christ sought quiet time to commune with God and to be strengthened by Him, it would be wise for us to do the same.

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Several years ago, my wife and I served as mission leaders in Tokyo, Japan. During a visit to our mission by then-Elder Russell M. Nelson, one of the missionaries asked him how best to respond when a person tells them that they are too busy to listen to them. With little hesitation, Elder Nelson said, “I would ask if they were too busy to eat lunch that day and then teach them that they have both a body and a spirit, and just as their body will die if not nourished, so will their spirit if not nourished by the good word of God.”

Empty

It is interesting to note that the Japanese word for “busy,” *isogashii*, is made up of a character with two symbols (). The one on the left means “heart” or “spirit,” and the one on the right means “death”—suggesting perhaps, as President Nelson taught, that being too busy to nourish our spirits can lead us to die spiritually.

The Lord knew—in this fast-paced world full of distractions and in commotion—that making quality time for Him would be one of the major challenges of our day. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, He provided these words of counsel and caution, which can be likened unto the tumultuous days in which we live:

“In returning and rest shall ye be saved; iniquity and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not.

“But ye said, No; for we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee: and, We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift.”

In other words, even though our salvation depends on returning to Him often and resting from the cares of the world, we do not. And even though our confidence will come from a strength developed in quiet times sitting with the Lord in meditation and reflection, we do not. Why not? Because we say, “No, we are busy with other things”—fleeing upon our horses, so to speak. Therefore, we will get further and further away from God; we will insist on going faster and faster; and the faster we go, the swifter Satan will follow in pursuit.

Perhaps this is why President Nelson has repeatedly pled with us to make time for the Lord in our lives—“each and every day.” He reminds us that “quiet time is sacred time—time that will facilitate personal revelation and instill peace.” But to hear the still voice of the Lord, he counseled, “you too must be still.”

Being still, however, requires more than just making time for the Lord—it requires letting go of our doubtful and fearful thoughts and focusing our hearts and minds on Him. Elder David A. Bednar taught, “The Lord’s admonition to ‘be still’ entails much more than simply not talking or not moving.” To be still, he suggested, “may be a way of reminding us to focus upon the Savior unfailingly.”

Being still is an act of faith and requires effort. Lectures on Faith states, “When a man works by faith he works by mental exertion.” President Nelson declared: “Our focus must be riveted on the Savior and His gospel. It is mentally rigorous to strive to look unto Him in every thought. But when we do, our doubts and fears flee.” Speaking of this need to focus our minds, President David O. McKay said: “I think we pay too little attention to the value of meditation, a principle of devotion. . . . Meditation is one of the . . . most sacred doors through which we pass into the presence of the Lord.”

There is a word in Japanese, *muji*, that, for me, captures this more faith-filled, contemplative sense of what it means to be still. It is comprised of two characters (無為). The one on the left means “nothing” or “nothingness,” and the one on the right means “to do.” Together they mean “non-doing.” Taken literally, the word could be misinterpreted to mean “to do nothing” in the same way “to be still” can be misinterpreted as “not talking or moving.” However, like the phrase “to be still,” it has a higher meaning; for me it is

a reminder to slow down and to live with greater spiritual awareness.

While serving in the Asia North Area Presidency with Elder Takashi Wada, I learned that his wife, Sister Naomi Wada, is an accomplished Japanese calligrapher. I asked Sister Wada if she would draw for me the Japanese characters for the word *mui*. I wanted to hang the calligraphy on my wall as a reminder to be still and to focus on the Savior. I was surprised when she did not readily agree to this seemingly simple request.

The next day, knowing that I had likely misunderstood her hesitance, Elder Wada explained that writing those characters would require a significant effort. She would need to ponder and meditate on the concept and the characters until she understood the meaning deeply in her soul and could give expression to these heartfelt impressions with each stroke of her brush. I was embarrassed that I had so casually asked her to do something so demanding. I asked him to convey my apologies to her for my ignorance and to let her know that I was withdrawing my request.

You can imagine my surprise and gratitude when upon my leaving Japan, Sister Wada, unsolicited, gifted to me this beautiful piece of calligraphy featuring the Japanese characters for the word *mui*. It now hangs prominently on the wall of my office, reminding me to be still and to seek the Lord every day with all my heart, might, mind, and strength. She had captured, in this selfless act, the meaning of *mui*, or stillness, better than any words could. Rather than mindlessly and dutifully drawing the characters, she approached her calligraphy with full purpose of heart and real intent.

Likewise, God desires that we approach our time with Him with the same kind of heartfelt devotion. When we do so, our worship becomes an expression of our love for Him.

He yearns for us to commune with Him. On one occasion, after I gave the invocation in a meeting with the First Presidency, President Nelson turned to me and said, “While you were praying, I thought how much God must appreciate when we take time from our busy schedules to acknowledge Him.” It was a simple yet powerful reminder of how much it must mean to Heavenly Father when we pause to commune with Him.

As much as He desires our attention, He will not force us to come to Him. To the Neph-

ites, the resurrected Lord said, “How oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens, and ye would not.” He followed that with this hopeful invitation that also applies to us today: “How oft will I gather you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, if ye will repent and return unto me with full purpose of heart.”

The gospel of Jesus Christ gives us opportunities to return to Him often. These opportunities include daily prayers, scripture study, the sacrament ordinance, the Sabbath day, and temple worship. What if we were to take these sacred opportunities off our to-do lists and put them on our “non-doing” lists—meaning to approach them with the same mindfulness and focus with which Sister Wada approaches her calligraphy?

You may be thinking, “I do not have time for that.” I have often felt the same. But let me suggest that what may be needed is not necessarily more time but more awareness of and focus on God during the times we already set aside for Him.

For example, when praying, what if we were to spend less time talking and more time just being with God; and when we were to speak, to give more heartfelt and specific expressions of gratitude and love?

President Nelson has counseled that we not just read the scriptures but savor them. What difference would it make if we were to do less reading and more savoring?

What if we were to do more to prepare our minds to partake of the sacrament and joyfully pondered the blessings of the Atonement of Jesus Christ during this sacred ordinance?

On the Sabbath, which in Hebrew means “rest,” what if we were to rest from other cares and to take time to sit quietly with the Lord to pay our devotions unto Him?

During our temple worship, what if we were to make a more disciplined effort to pay attention or lingered a little longer in the celestial room in quiet reflection?

When our focus is less on doing and more on strengthening our covenant connection with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, I testify that each of these sacred moments will be enriched, and we will receive the guidance needed in our personal lives. We, like Martha in the account in Luke, are often “careful and troubled about many things.” However, as we commune with the Lord each day, He will help us to know that which is

most needful.

Even the Savior took time from His ministry to be still. The scriptures are replete with examples of the Lord retreating to a solitary place—a mountain, the wilderness, a desert place, or going “a little way off”—to pray to the Father. If Jesus Christ sought quiet time to commune with God and to be strengthened by Him, it would be wise for us to do the same.

As we concentrate our hearts and minds on Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ and listen to the still, small voice of the Holy Ghost, we will have greater clarity about what is most needful, develop deeper compassion, and find rest and strength in Him. Paradoxically, helping God hasten His work of salvation and exaltation may require that we slow down. Being always in motion may be adding to the commotion in our lives and robbing us of the peace we seek.

I testify that as we return often to the Lord with full purpose of heart, we will in quietness and confidence come to know Him and feel His infinite covenantal love for us.

The Lord promised:

“Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you; seek me diligently and ye shall find me.”

“And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.”

I testify that this promise is true. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.