

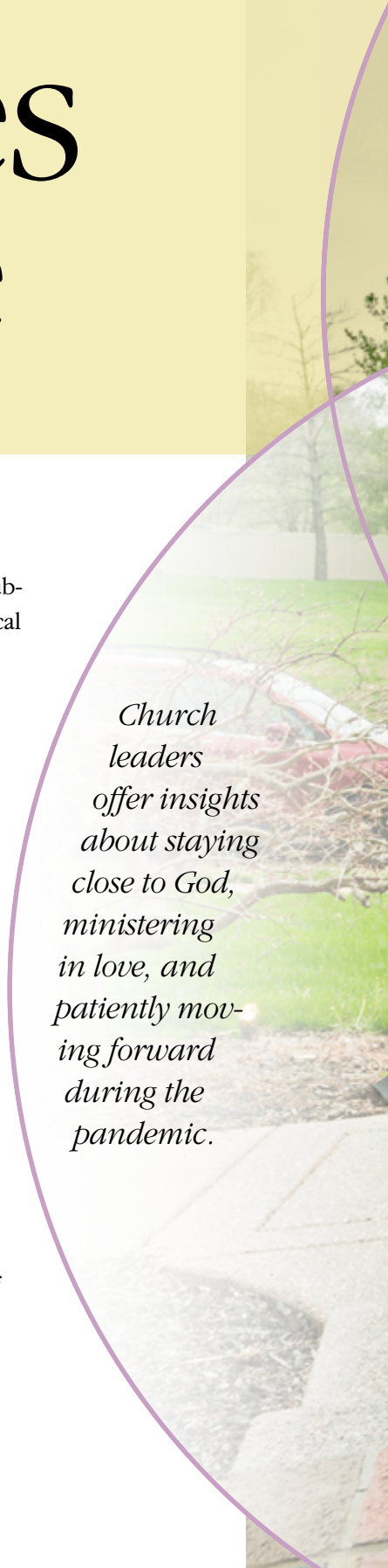
APOSTLES SHARE Messages of Hope

In response to the virus spreading around the world, officials ban public gatherings and implement quarantines. Schools close, ecclesiastical leaders cancel church meetings, and those who venture outside are required to wear face masks for protection.

The year is 1919, and the raging influenza pandemic that began the year before will claim tens of millions of lives.¹ The Church's new prophet, President Heber J. Grant (1856–1945), was set apart in November 1918 but will not be sustained until June 1919 because April general conference has been postponed.

During his ministry following those and other challenging days, President Grant gave counsel fitting for our day when he said, “We came to this earth to obtain knowledge, wisdom, and experience, to learn the lessons, suffer the pains, endure the temptations, and gain the victories of mortality.” From knowledge he gained through the crucible of personal experience, he added, “I . . . know that in the hour of adversity the Latter-day Saints are comforted and blessed and consoled as no other people are!”²

In our current “hour of adversity” with the novel coronavirus, we draw comfort and consolation from the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Our knowledge that Heavenly Father loves His children and that He has called prophets and apostles in our day to guide us through the storms of mortality is a great blessing.



Church leaders offer insights about staying close to God, ministering in love, and patiently moving forward during the pandemic.



PHOTOGRAPHS FROM GETTY IMAGES

From counsel shared during recent interviews, several members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles remind us that we can feel joy and look to the future with hope regardless of what is happening around us.³

The Work Goes Forward

Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) once likened the Church to “a great caravan” that moves forward despite opposition.⁴ Elder David A. Bednar attributes the caravan’s steady forward momentum to the Church’s inspired preparation and its history with adversity.

“No unhallowed hand can stop this work from progressing,⁵ and no pandemic will stop this work from progressing either,” he said. “In the midst of all the challenges we face now dealing with this virus, the work goes forward. . . . We do not know how long it will take, but we will overcome. And we may not resume our previous pattern of life exactly as we knew it, but many of those adaptations and changes will be very positive.”

Elder Quentin L. Cook said the Church’s inspired preparation includes such timely examples as emphasis on Sabbath day observance, strengthening Melchizedek Priesthood quorums and Relief Societies, the shift to ministering, and the introduction of *Come, Follow Me*, the Book of Mormon videos, and the Children and Youth program.

“We will look back on this as a foundational time of preparation and not just something we had to endure,” he said.

President M. Russell Ballard, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, concurs.

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—Elder David A. Bednar

Despite the temporary closure of temples and meetinghouses, members of the Church have the spiritual tools they need to continue moving forward.

President Ballard remembers how he felt coming home from church on December 7, 1941, to find out that Pearl Harbor had been attacked and that the United States was about to be drawn into World War II. Like many people today, he worried about the future and wondered whether his own future would be lost.

“But that’s not what happened,” he said. Just as the free people of the world won that war, so will the world win the war against the coronavirus. “Everything is going to be just fine as we turn our hearts to our Father in Heaven and look to Him and to the Savior as the Redeemer of all mankind,” he said.

Another way the Church moves forward is through its missionary efforts, which are responding to changing world conditions. Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf said that Church leaders had been studying new ways of sharing the gospel even before COVID-19 began disrupting missionary work. That disruption has included transporting thousands of missionaries to their home



countries, releasing some early, and reassigning others.

“COVID-19 accelerated our thinking about this tremendously and opened our eyes,” he said. As a result, technology and social media are now opening doors that previously had been closed by gated communities and inaccessible homes and apartment buildings.

“Missionary work will continue to move forward in spite of the pandemic,” Elder Uchtdorf added. “We are continuing to learn how to improve missionary work now and for the future. The Lord has promised to hasten His work for the blessing of all of God’s children (see Doctrine and Covenants 88:73). I feel that we are right in the middle of this process while living through this challenging time. Our precious missionaries are the pioneers of our day, blazing a trail of sharing the gospel message in new ways fitting to our circumstances so that the Church of Jesus Christ will continue to ‘roll forth, until it has filled the whole earth’” (Doctrine and Covenants 65:2).

New opportunities for sharing the gospel are not the only things that are opening. Hearts are also opening because difficult times often humble people and turn them toward God, said Elder D. Todd Christofferson.

“They’re a little more open to thinking, ‘Maybe I need something beyond my bank account. Maybe there’s more to life than what I’ve been living,’” he said.

Elder Christofferson encourages Church members to look for missionary opportunities, such as sharing gospel-related messages and memes via social media, communicating with the full-time missionaries about helping fellowship people they are teaching online, and

staying in touch with people they are not able to see often.

Social Distancing and Spiritual Distancing

Another way the Church moves forward is through the spiritual response of Latter-day Saints to temporal challenges like COVID-19. For our physical protection, we increase our physical distance from others, but for our spiritual protection, we draw closer to our Father in Heaven and His Son. The COVID-19 pandemic has given many Church members more opportunities to increase their spiritual protection by following President Russell M. Nelson’s counsel to hear the Lord.

“Our Father knows that when we are surrounded by uncertainty and fear, what will help us the very most is to hear His Son,” President Nelson said during the April 2020 general conference. He added, “As we seek to be disciples of Jesus Christ, our efforts to *hear Him* need to be ever more intentional. It takes conscious and consistent effort to fill our daily lives with His words, His teachings, His truths.”⁶

While we do not welcome the suspension of Church meetings, the closure of temples, or the loss of jobs, spending more time at home gives us “a chance to think about awakening unto God” (see Alma 5:7), said Elder Cook. “Perhaps recent events can be a spiritual alarm clock focusing us on those things that matter most. If so, it will be a great blessing in this period to concentrate on things that we can perfect in our lives and how we can bless the lives of others as we awaken unto God and move along the covenant path.”

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland added, “Such times invite us to look into our soul to see if we like what we see there. That’s when [we] think about who [we] really are and what really matters.”

Such times also invite us to increase our faith, service, and gratitude, prompting us to “consider our dependence on God and the blessings from Him we so often take for granted,” said Elder Holland. “We owe it to our Father in Heaven to be a little more grateful, a little more thankful, and a little more inclined to remember how many problems are resolved because of God, angels, covenantal promises, and prayer.”

At the center of our gratitude is the blessing of remembering “how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until [this] time” (Moroni 10:3). Members of the Quorum of the Twelve said that whenever we are required to “shelter in place,” we can follow the example of Nephi and Alma, remembering that He “in whom [we] have trusted,” the Savior Jesus Christ, “will still deliver [us]” (2 Nephi 4:19; Alma 36:27). And we can remember, as the Apostle Paul taught, that nothing can “separate us from the love of Christ” (see Romans 8:35).

The Lord Jesus Christ “is our ultimate shelter” (see Psalm 61:1–4), said Elder Holland. “Whatever else happens, we will never be separated from the Savior’s love and His companionship, even if we don’t recognize it at the time. The Spirit is not blocked by a virus or by national boundaries or by medical forecasts.”

“Do Kind Things”

Recently, while reading a report produced by a Church committee, Elder Christofferson became concerned about the effects “enforced solitude” can have on single members of the Church—old and young.




“Enforced solitude can lead to loneliness, and loneliness can have negative physical and mental health consequences,” he said. “To counteract that, some public health advocates recommend that those experiencing loneliness look for ways to ‘do kind things’ for someone.”

Latter-day Saints can find ways to serve, help, and contribute to others, especially to those who are lonely, said Elder Christofferson, and lonely members who render service to others can lessen their feelings of isolation.

“Focus on ministering,” he said. “There’s a lot we can do for each other to have a sense of belonging and brotherhood and sisterhood. This is a time when the elders quorum and the Relief Society can really come into their own and provide what only they are uniquely organized to do.”

And rather than always text someone, he suggested, “I think it’s very healthy to call someone using that old technology called the telephone. Just call to talk and interact. Let them hear a voice.”

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a big difference, brightening someone's day in ways we may not know. "Our ministering is very much needed with people being so isolated," said Elder Cook.

Elder Holland suggested, "We ought to dedicate a certain part of our day to communicating to people who need a boost. Of course, we get a boost from doing that, so everyone is 'lifted up' (3 Nephi 27:14, 15), as the Savior said He was sent to earth to do."

Another way we can lift ourselves and others is to prepare for the day when the temples reopen. Temple closures—whether for pandemics, remodeling, or cleaning—"provide a marvelous opportunity to learn more about family history research, indexing, and how to prepare many, many names for the day when the temple doors will open again," said Elder Bednar.

Regardless of whether temples are open or closed, Elder Bednar added, members of the Church can still strive to be worthy of and have a current temple recommend.

Lessons the Lord Would Have Us Learn

As Elder Bednar pointed out, while no one would choose to experience the COVID-19 pandemic, a latter-day plague is upon us nonetheless.

"With the eternal perspective that the restored gospel provides and the grace that comes from the Savior's Atonement, we can learn lessons from the adversity of mortality that prepare us for the blessings of eternity," he said. "We have to pray. We have to seek. We have to ask. We have to have eyes to see and ears to hear. But we can be blessed in remarkable ways to learn lessons that will bless us now and forever."

With its devastating impact on families throughout the world, COVID-19 has taught people to show increased concern for others, said President Ballard.

"We are coming to realize how precious our families are, how precious our neighbors are, and how precious our fellow Church members are," he said. "There are lessons we are learning now that will make us better people."

And when the current storm passes, what can we expect then? More of the same, said Elder Uchtdorf. God's children inside and outside the Church will continue to face challenges.

"We are living in a time when we need to learn," he said. And the most important lesson we can learn is that the answer to coming challenges is also the answer to the current challenge: the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Because Latter-day Saints have the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, Elder Holland said, they can learn to be positive and optimistic, doing the best they can and taking the Lord at His word when He said, "Let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed" (Doctrine and Covenants 123:17).

"There is a lot to be joyful about as we refine our faith, trust more in the Lord, and see the miracle of His deliverance," Elder Holland said. ■

NOTES

1. See William G. Hartley, "The Church Grows in Strength," *Ensign*, Sept. 1999, 35.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Heber J. Grant* (2002), 49, 48.
3. See Russell M. Nelson, "Joy and Spiritual Survival," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2016, 82.
4. Bruce R. McConkie, "The Caravan Moves On," *Ensign*, Nov. 1984, 85.
5. Joseph Smith, in *History of the Church*, 4:540.
6. Russell M. Nelson, "Hear Him," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2020, 89.