



*My attempts at
kicking a soda
habit taught me
some important
spiritual lessons
about gradual
change.*

WHAT I LEARNED FROM ACCIDENTALLY TURNING MYSELF ORANGE

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Bit by bit, and blissfully unaware, I was poisoning myself. OK, I use the term “poisoning” a bit loosely here, but to a teenage guy in high school, the word seemed appropriate. I had turned my skin orange.

Without realizing it.

You see, I was trying to kick a soda habit and did so by rather unconventional means. I started drinking freshly-made carrot juice. My dad had bought a juicer that extracted nothing but juice—which means you cruise through plenty more carrots that way (and consume *a lot* of beta-carotene).

Fun fact: beta-carotene, at those levels, enters the bloodstream and starts painting you from the inside out. It’s harmless to your overall health but becomes oh-so-visible over time. Somehow, though, I still hadn’t noticed the effects unfolding until a friend squinted at me in the sunlight one afternoon.

“Um, Dave, is your skin . . . orange?” she asked.

“No!” I laughed. What an absurd question.

Then she held her forearm next to mine for comparison. I glanced down in shock. My skin looked like it was slathered in pumpkin puree compared to hers. From that moment on, I cut way back on the carrot juice.

SLOW BUT SURE

It’s not always easy to tell when changes are taking place within us. Sometimes changes happen so slowly that it’s hard to notice them. Yet even small, steady changes can add up in a big way over time. Do you remember that long-anticipated day when you were *finally* tall enough to go on the best rides at the fair or amusement park?

Spiritual changes, of course, are more important than physical ones. Yet even those can be hard to detect on a day-to-day basis. President Boyd K. Packer (1924–2015), President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, once taught,

“We become taller in testimony like we grow taller in physical stature; we hardly know it happens because it comes by growth.”¹

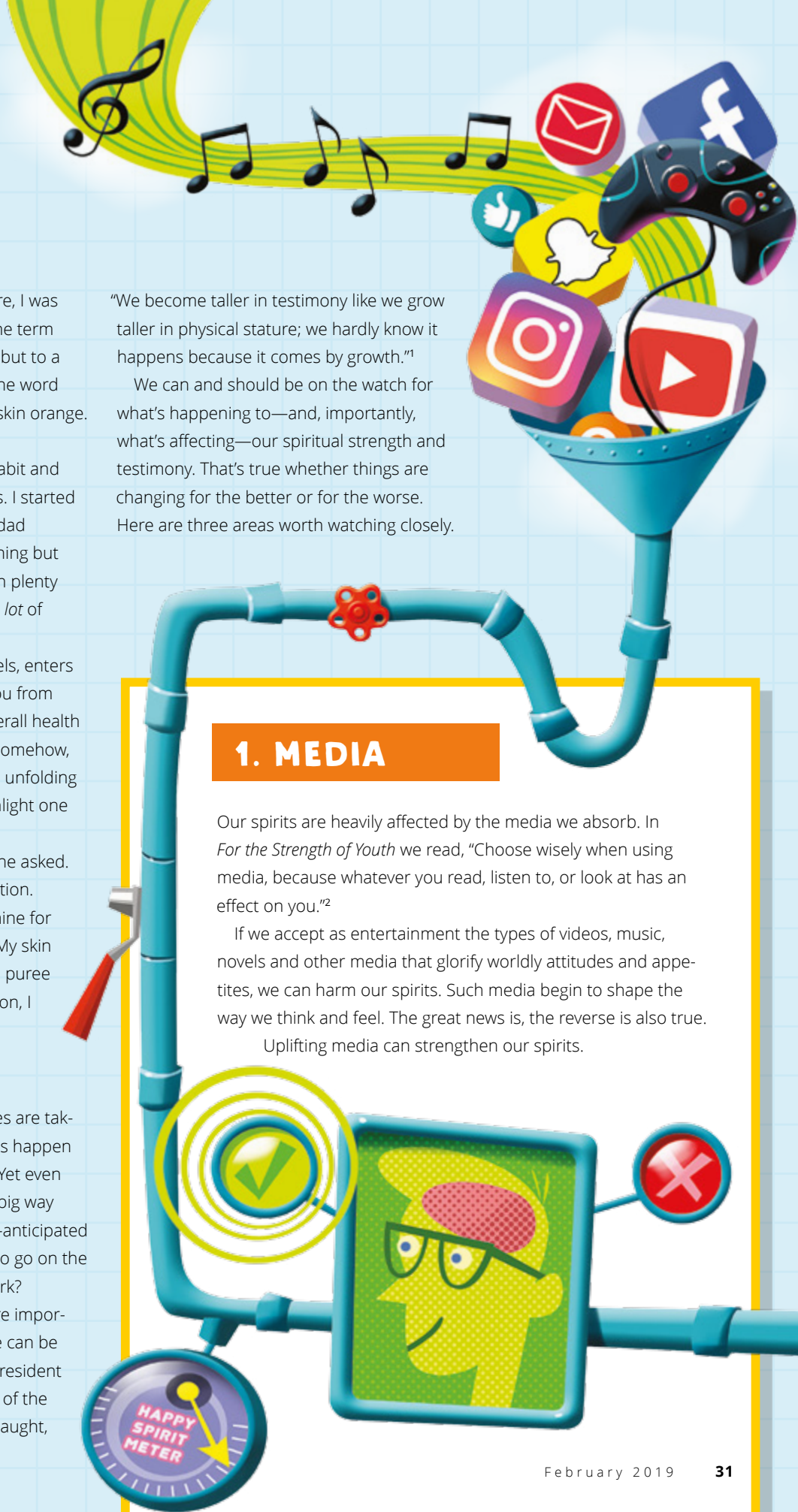
We can and should be on the watch for what’s happening to—and, importantly, what’s affecting—our spiritual strength and testimony. That’s true whether things are changing for the better or for the worse. Here are three areas worth watching closely.


1. MEDIA

Our spirits are heavily affected by the media we absorb. In *For the Strength of Youth* we read, “Choose wisely when using media, because whatever you read, listen to, or look at has an effect on you.”²

If we accept as entertainment the types of videos, music, novels and other media that glorify worldly attitudes and appetites, we can harm our spirits. Such media begin to shape the way we think and feel. The great news is, the reverse is also true.

Uplifting media can strengthen our spirits.





For example, President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) taught: “Inspiring music may fill the soul with heavenly thoughts, move one to righteous action, or speak peace to the soul. When Saul was troubled with an evil spirit, David played for him with his harp and Saul was refreshed and the evil spirit departed. (See 1 Samuel 16:23).”³

Do you have any troubles of your own that you’d like to “depart” out of your life? A good place to start is to embrace uplifting and spirit-strengthening media.

2. FRIENDS

The people we surround ourselves with each day can have a massive impact on our spiritual health. In *For the Strength of Youth*, we read, “[Friends] will influence how you think and act, and even help determine the person you will become.”⁴

Imagine all the little inside jokes you and your friends share. A single word that reminds you of a shared experience can be enough to start you and your friends laughing hysterically. We start to talk, think, and act like our friends.



Your friends shape you one way or another (whether you want them to or not), so be sure that they’re changing you for the better. At the same time, make sure that you’re changing *them* for the better. After all, the world needs more friends of the awesome variety. One of those awesome friends can be you, at all times and in all places.



3. ACTIVITIES

How many different ways could you spend a million dollars? The possible combinations are endless. Now, how many different ways can you spend 24 hours? A week? A summer vacation?

Again, the possibilities are endless. Perhaps more than any other consideration, the way we spend our time will shape not only our spirits but also our character and ultimately our eternal reward.

Do we attend our Church meetings or sleep in and then watch TV instead? Do we cram every minute of the day with to-do lists and entertainment, or do we allow time for pondering the scriptures and serving others?

In his worldwide devotional for youth, President Russell M. Nelson taught at least one way we can figure out how to spend our time. We can pray to know how to use it.

After inviting the youth to give up a portion of their time to help gather Israel, he taught, “As you pray about this sacrifice of time, you will be guided to know both what you can give up that week and what you can do instead to help gather Israel. For example, a young golfer might give up a round of golf and spend that time in the temple baptism.”⁵

Time management is a difficult thing. For instance, it’s great to pursue worthwhile hobbies like playing the piano or learning to carve. Yet even good and worthy pursuits like these can block out more important matters if we dedicate too much of our precious time to them.

Even something as important as serving in the Church can’t be allowed to take priority over showing up to work or spending enough time with family. Speaking to the bishops of the Church, President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) taught, “It is possible to budget your time so that you neglect neither your employer, your family, nor your flock.”⁶

If a bishop can strike that balance, so can you! Finding an ideal mix of how to spend your time is crucial, and it’s one of the biggest factors in staying strong on the covenant path. So, make time management a matter of prayer. Take the guesswork out of it.

LITTLE CHOICES, BIG CHANGES

Back to my beta-carotene fiasco for a moment. In the end, I swapped in some celery sticks and apple slices to replace most of the carrots in my not-quite-as-good-as-soda beverage. And, in time, my skin returned to its normal hue. Whew! Though it was a huge relief at the time, that particular snag was a small one in the grand scheme of eternal matters.

However, what if you start doing the things that nourish and strengthen your spirit and soon notice that you’re being more patient with others? Or perhaps you find that you’re much more receptive to the promptings of the Holy Ghost, such as noticing when somebody around you needs a little extra help?

Those are *not* small changes. Those are the types of changes that shape your spiritual journey in this life and the next. Ultimately, large changes start with lots of little choices.

So, pay close attention to the little choices. They’ll steer you right in a big way. **NE**

NOTES

1. Boyd K. Packer, “The Quest for Spiritual Knowledge,” *New Era*, Jan. 2007, 4.
2. *For the Strength of Youth* (2011), 11.
3. Ezra Taft Benson, “Do Not Despair,” Oct. 1974 general conference.
4. *For the Strength of Youth* (2011), 16.
5. Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel” (worldwide youth devotional, June 3, 2018), 15, [HopeofIsrael.org](https://www.hopeofisrael.org).
6. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Shepherds of Israel,” Oct. 2003 general conference.