
What Can You Learn?

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Hello my friend,

How is your new year going? Are there positive things you're looking forward to this year?

I know there's one thing that you're looking forward to being over with... the pandemic.

I know it has taken a toll on us, but there's a great quote by President M. Russell Ballard in a recent Church News article where he said, "Just keep smiling. The pandemic will wear itself out, but don't let it wear you out. Just keep getting up in the morning and keep raising your families. Things will be OK."

He knows a few things about traumatic world events. He was a 14 year old boy witnessing World War II and the anxiety and fear of the world. "But the world didn't end." He said, "The world went on. And afterward, it was rebuilt with remarkable blessings to the human family."

I encourage you to read the full article here: <https://www.thechurchnews.com/leaders-and-ministry/2022-01-06/covid-19-pandemic-two-years-president-ballard-message-of-optimism-238887>

We can look forward to the happy day when this experience will be behind us, and a great positive change will have occurred. Personally, I know the way I can turn a negative experience into positive one is to ask myself the question, "What should I be learning from this experience?"

I'll bet if you looked hard enough, you could find many things that you are learning. Maybe patience is one thing, compassion for others may be another, or the importance of family might have become acutely apparent.

Here's a learning that crossed my mind.

Is your spiritual, eternal life more important than your physical life?

This pandemic has caused us to realize the frailty of life here on the earth, and our health care systems have been pushed to their limits to care for and try to preserve the lives of so many people who have been afflicted with this awful, debilitating virus.

With that in mind, what if we saw sin as a virus?

What if we took the same precautions to stay as far away from sin as possible, not people who sin, but sin itself? And what if we set up systems to help those who were suffering from sin?

That sounds like the church and gospel.

If we are eternal beings, then sin is a more deadly virus than Covid-19 or anything else. Because the end of our physical life here on earth is not the worst thing that can happen to us. A more detrimental outcome is our separation from God. And that's what sin does to us.

But God has provided a cure. It's available to everyone and so simple a child can understand it. But it doesn't make logical sense, to our mortal minds. The reason for this is so that we can be sure that it is God that is helping us, rather than some explainable earthly force. This is why we need faith.

A great Old Testament example that God used to try to teach the Israelites (and us) this lesson is the fiery flying serpents that bit the Israelites while they were in the wilderness, causing many to die. Moses prayed for a solution and the Lord told him to fasten a brazen serpent on a pole and hold it up so that all the people needed to do was to look at the serpent and they would be healed.

This makes no sense.

But that's exactly why God set it up as a way to be healed. So that the people would know that it was God who healed them, not some great medicine. (1 Neph 17:41)

Many years later, referring to this story, Jesus told Nicodemus,

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:14-15)

We are to look to Jesus and live. He is the cure!

To our mortal, physical, worldly selves, this doesn't make sense either. How can someone who died on a cross in the first century have any connection with my life? That's why many people do not believe in Jesus. Who can blame them? Without a knowledge of the bigger picture it can't be understood.

But we know better. We know the bigger picture. We have ancient writings that tell us about God and His loving plan for all His children. We have prophets and apostles who testify of these truths and teach us how to apply them in our day.

We know about the virus of sin and how to cure it. God gave us the cure, His son, Jesus Christ.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

Faith that Jesus Christ can forgive us of our sins, if we repent, is how we cure the more deadly virus of sin. Christ's message was repentance and forgiveness through Him.

"Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel." (Mark 1:14-15)

"Therefore, whosoever repenteth, and hardeneth not his heart, he shall have claim on mercy through mine Only Begotten Son, unto a remission of his sins; and these shall enter into my rest." (Alma 12:34)

"Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more. By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins — behold, he will confess them and forsake them." (D&C 58:42-43)

The cure for the most deadly virus of our eternal beings has been prescribed. We can have hope and joy because we know it!

All we need to do is look.

We will get through this earthly challenge. The church and kingdom of God will continue to go forth throughout the world. Our Father in Heaven is overseeing His plan, and He knows your struggles.

He wants you and I to learn something.

Have faith and keep smiling!

Bishop Williams

P.S.

- January 9th - Young Adult Devotional with Elder Rasband, 4:00pm PST (see link below)
<https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/event/young-adult-english-devotional-with-elder-ronald-a-rasband>
- January 9th - Stake Youth Fireside - 6:30-8:00pm, at the Stake Center.
- January 14-15th - Stake Young Men Winter Campout at Stevens Pass. Meet at the church at 2:15pm, Friday.

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